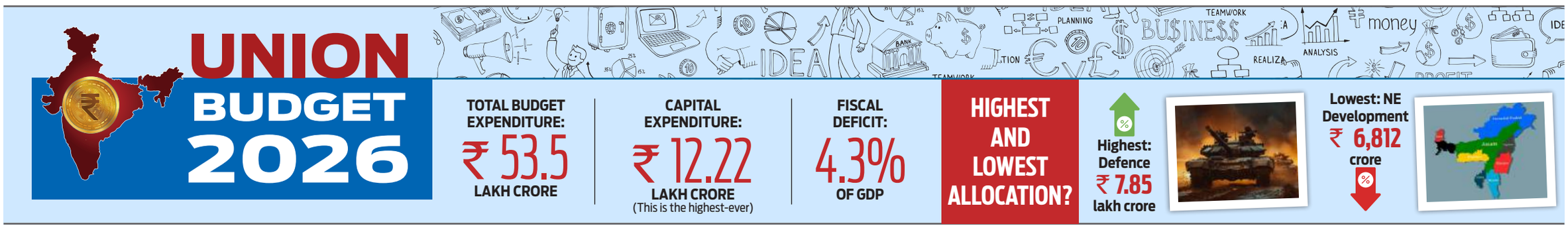

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 2 FEBRUARY 2026 | MONDAY | BENGALURU | 13 SHABAN, 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 30 | Pages: 8

With Budget, India fights off US tariffs

Manufacturing and tax incentives take centre stage

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday announced measures to boost manufacturing, offered long-term tax incentives for global data centres and support for agriculture in the Union Budget 2026-27.

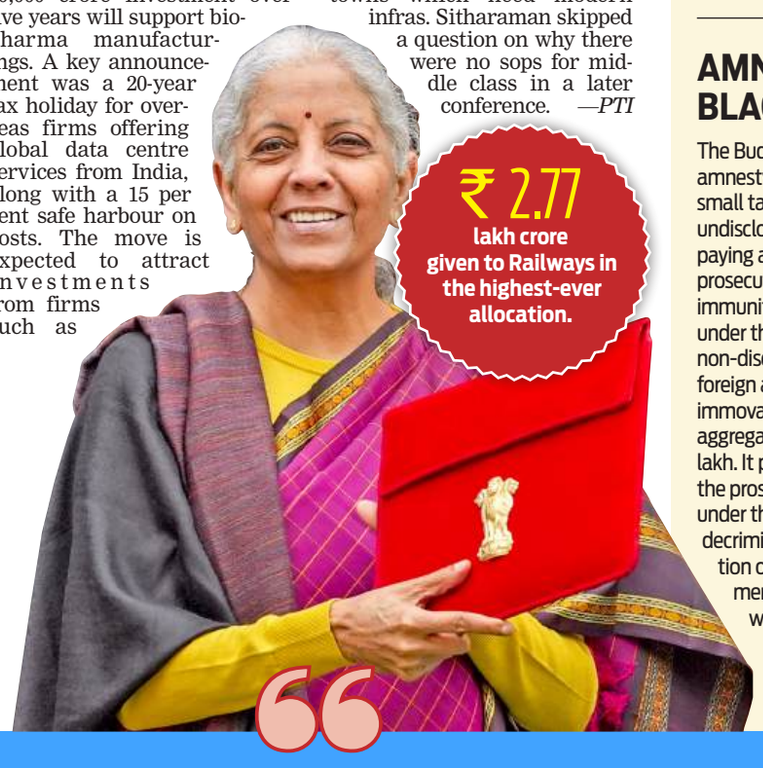
This is seen as a blueprint for growth amid rising global risks. It is also seen as a response to fight off the impact of 50 per cent tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump on Indian goods.

She also announced a series of customs-duty related restructuring, including cutting taxes on dutiable goods imported for personal use and allowing duty-free imports of aircraft raw materials.

However, it made no direct concessions for the middle class.

Shunning populist measures despite elections due in five states, including West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, the Budget underscored fiscal consolidation and capital expenditure. Presenting her record ninth consecutive Budget in a nearly 90-minute Lok Sabha speech, Sitharaman outlined anchor schemes aligned with the 'Viksit Bharat' vision, focusing on employment generation and blending future technologies with legacy industries.

Manufacturing will be scaled up across seven priority sectors — pharmaceuticals, semiconductors, rare-earth magnets, chemicals, capital goods, textiles and sports goods. Electronics manufacturing outlay was doubled to Rs 40,000 crore, driven by the success of iPhone production, while a second phase of the semiconductor mission was announced. A Rs 10,000 crore investment over five years will support biopharma manufacturings. A key announcement was a 20-year tax holiday for overseas firms offering global data centre services from India, along with a 15 per cent safe harbour on costs. The move is expected to attract investments from firms such as Google, Microsoft and Amazon Web Services, which committed about USD 40 billion in 2025. On fiscal parameters, the government reiterated its consolidation path, targeting a debt-to-GDP ratio of 55.6 per cent next year and market borrowings of Rs 17.2 lakh crore. She also said that the government will focus on tier II, III cities and temple towns which need modern infras. Sitharaman skipped a question on why there were no sops for middle class in a later conference. —*PTI*



WHAT'S CHEAP?

- Cancer drugs
- Studying abroad
- Foreign trips
- Sea food
- Leather and footwear
- Microwave
- Phone
- Video game components
- Cameras
- Aircraft parts
- Biofuel with CNG
- Made in India phone

WHAT'S EXPENSIVE?

- Smart TV
- Laptops
- Liquor
- Coal
- Scrap
- ATM dispenser machine
- Fertilisers.
- Coffee machine

HIGHLIGHTS

- No change in Income Tax rates.
- New Income Tax Act, 2025, to be implemented from 1 April.
- No customs duty on imports of goods for nuclear power projects till 2035.
- Customs duty exemptions to civil and defence plane manufacturing.
- Tax holiday for foreign cos offering cloud services using India data centres.
- One girls' hostel will be set up in every district.
- 15,000 schools & 500 colleges to get content creation lab.
- To build trekking trails in Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Himachal, and Uttarakhand
- Govt to launch coconut promotion scheme, boost cashew and cocoa sectors
- Foreign people can invest in domestic equities.
- Time limit for filing revised IT returns extended from 31 Dec to 31 March.
- After petrol-ethanol, CNG to now have bio-gas blending.
- Rs 6,000 crore for Census 2027.
- Rs 13,000 for Space Department.
- Three new All India Institutes of Ayurveda to be set up to strengthen research in traditional medicines.

A RECORD FOR NIRMALA

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made history by presenting a record ninth consecutive Union Budget, second only to Morarji Desai's record of 10 budgets.

AMNESTY FOR BLACK MONEY

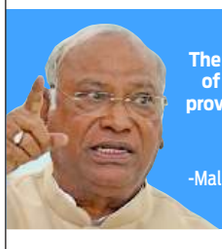
The Budget proposed an amnesty scheme allowing small taxpayers to declare undisclosed foreign income by paying additional tax to avoid prosecution. It also grants immunity from prosecution under the Black Money Act for non-disclosure of movable foreign assets, excluding immovable property, with aggregate value below Rs 20 lakh. It proposed rationalising the prosecution framework under the Income Tax Act. It decriminalised non-production of books and documents and TDS defaults where payment is in kind, making minor offences punishable only with fines.

D-Street bleeds as STT hiked

Investors' wealth eroded sharply by Rs 9.40 lakh crore on Sunday as equity markets plunged nearly 2 per cent following Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's proposal to raise the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on derivatives.

Addressing a post-Budget conference, Sitharaman clarified that the move is aimed at deterring small investors from speculative futures and options (F&O) trading, which has exposed them to heavy losses. "We are not against F&O trade, but small investors are facing huge losses, so this nominal increase is purely to discourage speculation," she said. The BSE Sensex reversed early gains, dropping 2,370.36 points (2.88 per cent) to 79,899.42 in afternoon trade before settling at 80,722.94, down 1,546.84 points (1.88 per cent). The NSE Nifty tumbled 495.20 points (1.96 per cent) to 24,825.45, after a day low of 24,571.75. Market analysts noted the hike, especially on futures from 0.02 per cent to 0.05 per cent, increases overall transaction costs and may weigh on liquidity, participation, and India's market competitiveness. Raj Gaikar of SAMCO Securities said it could dampen trading volumes, reduce FII participation, and pressure earnings for broking firms and exchanges. This marks one of eight negative Sensex sessions on Budget presentation days under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 15 Union Budgets since 2014. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pgs 2, 3, 4, 7



The Modi Government has run out of ideas. #Budget2026 does not provide a single solution to India's many economic, social, and political challenges
-Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress President

Today, we face an external environment in which trade and multilateralism are imperilled and access to resources and supply chains are disrupted
-Nirmala Sitharaman, Finance Minister

Today's budget is historic. It reflects the aspirations of 140 crore Indians. It strengthens the reform journey and charts a clear roadmap for Viksit Bharat
—Narendra Modi, PM

KARNATAKA GETS A 'KHALI CHOMBU' AGAIN: CM

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday strongly criticised the Union Budget, saying it had left the state with a "khaali chombu" (empty vessel) and lacked foresight. He said a "big injustice" had been done to Karnataka and alleged that the Budget contained only statements and no concrete benefits. He recalled that he had described last year's Budget in similar terms.

Speaking to reporters, Siddaramaiah said Karnataka had not been given anything in the Budget, adding that the entire southern region had been neglected. "Karnataka has been given only a chombu," he remarked. He noted that the only major references to the state were the proposed Bengaluru–Chennai and Hyderabad–Bengaluru high-speed rail corridors over five years, which he said would benefit Tamil Nadu and Telangana more than Karnataka. He pointed out that the state had sought high-speed rail links connecting Bengaluru with Mumbai, Mangaluru and Pune.

He also dismissed references to "Viksit Bharat" as mere rhetoric, saying there was no follow-through in action. He criticised the absence of any mention of Karnataka's irrigation needs, including demands to declare the Upper Bhadra and Upper Krishna projects as national projects. He further accused the Centre of delaying clearances for river water projects such as Mekedatu and Mahadayi. —*PTI*

Budget gives no major sops to Kerala, Bengal, TN

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

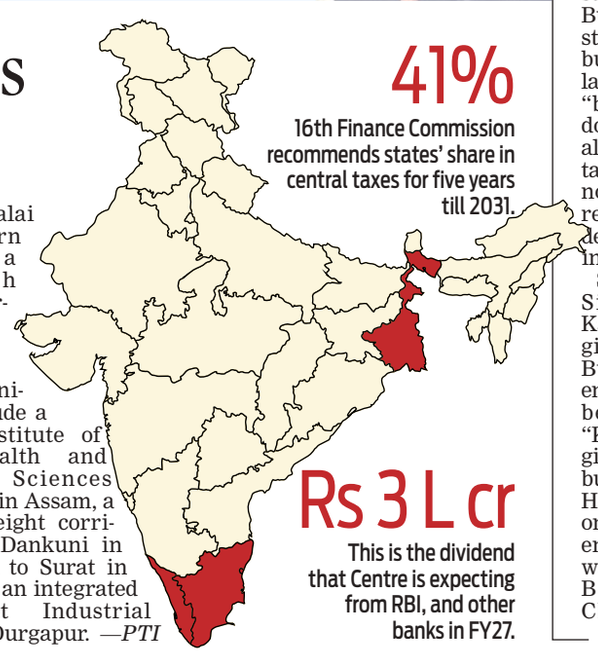
The Union Budget 2026-27 made no big-ticket announcements for states going to polls this year, including Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that "enough" had been done to cover both poll-bound and other states.

Leaders of ruling parties in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal criticised the Budget for "overlooking" their states. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, however, welcomed the proposals.

- Leaders of ruling parties in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal criticised the Budget for "overlooking" their states. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, however, welcomed the proposals.

While no major announcements were made for poll-bound states, the Budget included high-speed rail links for Chennai, an ecologically sustainable mountain trail at Podhigai Malai in the Western Ghats, and a rare-earth minerals corridor in southern states.

Other key initiatives include a National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) in Assam, a dedicated freight corridor linking Dankuni in West Bengal to Surat in Gujarat, and an integrated East Coast Industrial Corridor at Durgapur. —*PTI*



41%
16th Finance Commission recommends states' share in central taxes for five years till 2031.

Rs 3 L cr
This is the dividend that Centre is expecting from RBI, and other banks in FY27.

India to buy Venezuelan oil: Don

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

US President Donald Trump has claimed that India will be purchasing oil from Venezuela instead of Iran. Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One while flying to Palm Beach in Florida on Saturday, Trump made the remarks while responding to a question on whether China would recover money it had lent to Venezuela in exchange for oil supplies. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 5

Alcaraz youngest to win Aus Open

MELBOURNE, 1 FEB

Carlos Alcaraz is the youngest man ever to complete a career Grand Slam after securing the Australian Open title against Novak Djokovic, who had never lost in his 10 previous finals at Melbourne Park. The top-ranked Alcaraz dropped the first set Sunday as Djokovic went out hard in pursuit of a record major title, but he dug deep to win 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 8

AFTER LEXY HIKE

Cigarette prices rise up to Rs 55 per pack

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Cigarette prices have risen by Rs 22 to 25 per pack of 10 sticks following the implementation of additional excise duty from Sunday. Distributors said premium 76 mm cigarettes will now cost between Rs 50 and Rs 55 more per pack, depending on the brand.

While manufacturers are yet to issue revised MRPs, distributors have begun billing old stock to retailers with 40 per cent GST. With wholesale markets closed on Sunday, fresh stock with new MRPs is expected from Monday. Popular mid-sized Wills Navy Cut (76 mm) priced at Rs 95 per pack is expected to cost Rs 120, while 84 mm cigarettes such as Gold Flake Lights and Wills Classic, priced at Rs 170, may rise to Rs 220-225. Slim cigarettes like Classic Connect (97 mm) are set to increase from Rs 300 to Rs 350 per pack of 20 sticks.

The All India Consumer Products Distributors Federation (AICPDF), representing over 4.5 lakh distributors and 1.3 crore retail outlets, warned that the sharp tax hike could encourage smuggling and counterfeit products, and hurt traditional retailers already competing with online and quick-commerce platforms.

Under the new tax structure, short cigarettes up to 65 mm will face Rs 2.05–2.10 per stick, medium (65–70 mm) Rs 3.6–4, long (70–75 mm) Rs 5.4, with the highest Rs 8.50 per stick applying only to unusual designs. —*PTI*

Modi backs Trump's Gaza peace plan

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday reaffirmed India's support for the Palestinian people and welcomed US President Donald Trump's Gaza peace plan.

This was as New Delhi stayed away from the launch of the proposed 'Board of Peace', a Trump-backed platform seen by some as an alternative to the European Union's diplomatic efforts.

Ahead of his expected visit to Israel later this month, Modi met foreign ministers of the League of Arab States in New Delhi and underscored India's backing for ongoing peace initiatives, including efforts to end the Gaza conflict, according to a Prime Minister's Office statement. He also praised the Arab League's role in regional peace and stability.

"The Arab world is a part of India's extended neighbourhood... with a shared commitment to peace, progress and stability," Modi said in a post on X.

India did not attend the 22 January ceremony in Davos for the Board of Peace, envisaged as a global peace-making body starting with Gaza. However, New Delhi joined the EU in welcoming UN Security Council Resolution 2803, which endorsed the Board's creation. - Agencies

. Agencies —*PTI*

PM Narendra Modi met foreign ministers of the League of Arab States in New Delhi—*X.COM/NARENDRAMODI*

INDIA SLASHES AID TO BANGLADESH

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

India has halved the development assistance for Bangladesh to Rs 60 crore, reflecting frosty ties.

Bhutan got the largest share, Rs 2,288 crore, followed by Rs 800 crore for Nepal and Rs 550 crore each for the Maldives and Mauritius.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has been given Rs 22,118 crore against the current fiscal's budget of Rs 20,516 crore and the revised estimate of Rs 21,742 crore.

While the allocation to Bangladesh in 2025-26 was Rs 120 crore, the revised estimate cut it to Rs 34.48 crore.

The total overseas development partnership portfolio for 2025-26 has been pegged at Rs 6,997 crore, which is a little over 31 per cent of the MEA'a allocation. —*PTI*

4 states to get rare minerals corridor

TN, Kerala, Odisha, Andhra in focus as govt tries to reduce dependence on China

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the government will establish rare earth corridors in mineral-rich states of Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to promote the mining, processing, research and manufacturing of critical minerals.

The initiative aims to reduce India's heavy reliance on China, the dominant global producer and exporter of rare earth elements (REEs), which it has leveraged strategically in ongoing tariff disputes with the United States.

India's rare earth imports have risen from $14.1 million in 2014 to $17.5 million in 2024, with over 45 per cent sourced from China. Despite their name, rare earth elements are not particularly scarce. Key REEs include lanthanum, cerium, praseodymium, neodymium, samarium and europium. They are essential for clean energy technologies such as electric vehicles and wind turbines, defence applications, and high-tech devices including smartphones and hard drives. While deposits exist in Brazil, Australia and India, China holds nearly half of global reserves.

—FREEPIK

In India, rare earth minerals are found in Beach Sand Minerals (BSM), the principal ore containing monazite, a phosphate mineral rich in REEs, uranium and thorium. India produces high-purity rare earth oxides from monazite, but current output of around 4,000 tonnes is inadequate to meet domestic demand. The Finance Minister also announced that customs duty on monazite will be reduced from 2.5 per cent to zero. Kerala and Tamil Nadu hold significant monazite reserves in coastal, red and inland alluvial deposits, making them key to the corridors' success.

Kerala and Tamil Nadu, two of the target states, are also scheduled for assembly elections in the coming months, highlighting the political and strategic significance of the announcement. —PTI

GOVT BETS BIG ON SEMICONDUCTORS AND ELECTRONICS

The Centre announced major sops for semiconductors and electronics manufacturing to boost equipment, materials, design and strengthen supply chains amid threat of US tariffs.

HERE ARE THE KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Rs 40,000 crore to boost electronics manufacturing.
- Rs 40,000 crore for India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0.
- High-tech tool rooms will be established at 2 places to give push to capital goods manufacturing.
- No tax on goods used to make lithium-ion cells for battery storage.

NUCLEAR PROJECTS GET BIG RELIEF

This year's Union Budget removed a key cost barrier for nuclear projects as India prepares to expand capacity and open the sector to private participation. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed extending the basic duty exemption on imports of goods for nuclear power projects until 2035, covering all plants regardless of capacity. This is to encourage investment in nuclear power. This comes after the 2025 Atomic Energy (SHANTI) Bill, which allows private firms to develop and operate nuclear plants

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget attire always features regional textiles. On Sunday, she wore a Kanjivaram silk saree from Tamil Nadu while presenting her record 9th Union Budget.

MAJOR EXPENDITURE (IN RS LAKH CRORE)

Transport	5,98,500
Defence	5,94,585
Rural Development	2,73,108
Home Affairs	2,55,234
Agriculture and Allied Activities	1,62,671
Education	1,39,289
Energy	1,09,029
Health	1,04,599
Urban Development	85,522
IT and Telecom	74,566
Commerce and Industry	70,296
Social Welfare	62,362
Scientific Departments	55,756
Tax Administration	45,500
External Affairs	22,119
Finance	20,649
Development of NE	6,812

EDUCATION

The govt allocated Rs 1.39 lakh crore to education, marking an 8.27% increase over the previous financial year.

HERE ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS:

- Tax cut to 2% from 5% for foreign education students. Now, sending money abroad for studies or medical care will become slightly cheaper.
- A new National Institute of Design in eastern India.
- 5 University Townships in major industrial and logistic corridors.
- Set up or upgrade four telescope infra in Ladakh.

SHE MARTS TO HELP WOMEN

SHE Marts will be launched as community-owned retail outlets, enabling women, especially rural entrepreneurs, to access wider markets, build brands and secure more stable and sustainable sources of income.

NO FUNDS FOR CHABAHAR PROJECT

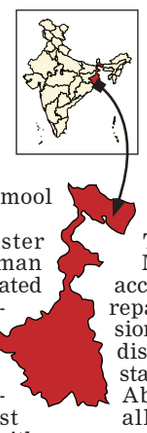
India has made no allocation for the Chabahar port project in the 2026 Union Budget, a decision that comes amid escalating tensions between Washington and Tehran and uncertainty over US sanctions on Iran.In the past, India has been investing about Rs 100 crore annually. The move is seen as a tactical pause amid Washington's sanctions on Iran. Last September, the US imposed sanctions on Iran but granted India a waiver, ending in April. Meanwhile, India weighed options amid threats of a 25 per cent tariff for dealing with Tehran.

CARBON CAPTURE

Rs 20,000 cr for carbon capture utilisation and storage tech. This aims to reduce CO2 emissions from industrial sectors like power, steel, and cement by capturing and storing or reusing carbon dioxide.

INFRA

Budget turns poll spotlight on Bengal with freight corridors



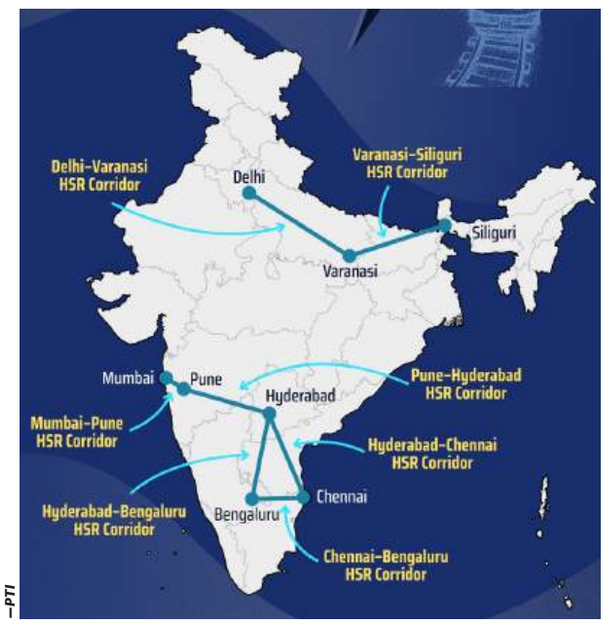
As West Bengal heads to Assembly election, the Budget has taken on a clear political tone, with big infrastructure promises drawing sharp criticism from the ruling Trinamool Congress.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a dedicated freight corridor linking Dankuni in West Bengal to Surat in Gujarat, alongside an integrated East Coast Industrial Corridor with a major node at Durgapur.

The Dankuni–Surat corridor is pitched as promoting environmentally sustainable cargo movement and reducing logistics costs. The Centre argues that shifting freight towards inland waterways and integrated corridors would spur industrial growth in a state it claims has suffered policy stagnation under the TMC.

Meanwhile, The TMC accused the Centre of repackaging old decisions as fresh sops and of discriminatory Centre–state relations. Party MP Abhishek Banerjee alleged "headline announcements with fiscal denial", claiming funds under schemes such as MGNREGA, PM Awas Yojana and Gramin Sadak Yojana have been blocked since the 2021 polls.

OTHER INFRA PUSH



—PTI

SEVEN HIGH-SPEED RAIL CORRIDORS TO COME UP BETWEEN:
Mumbai-Pune, Pune-Hyderabad, Hyderabad-Bengaluru, Hyderabad-Chennai, Chennai-Bengaluru, Delhi-Varanasi, Varanasi-Siliguri.

- Rs 2 lakh crore support under Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment.
- Rs 5,000 crore to set up seven City Economic Regions in Bengaluru, Bhubaneshwar-Puri-Cuttack tricities, Coimbatore-Erode-Tiruppur, Pune, Surat, Varanasi and Vishakhapatanam over a period of 5 years.
- It will also help develop Tier II and Tier III cities.
- 20 new National Waterways to connect mineral rich areas, industrial centres and ports.
- Setting up of ship repair ecosystem catering to inland waterways in Varanasi and Patna.

Coastal Cargo Promotion Scheme to increase the share of inland waterways and coastal shipping from 6% to 12%.

—PTI

Centre discriminating against South: Oppn leaders see red

>>>*Continued from Pg 1*

In Kerala, the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan criticized the Budget saying it exposed the BJP-led Centre's continued discrimination and neglect towards the southern state. The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) also echoed similar sentiments.

Vijayan said long-standing demands of the state, including an All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), seven high-speed corridors for railway development and a special package for the Vizhinjam port, were completely ignored.

Kerala Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said, "There was nothing for the states. In fact, fiscal devolution remains unchanged at 41 per cent, and many states have complained that they don't have enough to fulfil their own obligations to their citizens."

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said the Budget is "blind to India's real crises", and highlighted how the youth are without jobs, manufacturing is falling and farmers are in distress.

In Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister and DMK leader M K Stalin said the Budget was hugely disappointing for his state.

Opposition AIADMK, a part of the BJP-led NDA, AIADMK general secretary and Leader of Opposition Edappadi K Palaniswami said there were initiatives that would benefit Tamil Nadu's textile hubs, such as Tiruppur and Karur.

West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee slammed the Budget. "For West Bengal, what have they given? Nothing. They talk big, but offer nothing," the TMC chief added.

_PTI

As Tamil Nadu gears for the elections, we expected at least this year that the state would be visible to BJP government and our voices will be heard. However, this year too, the BJP government has delivered only disappointment

—MK Stalin, TN CM

It's a 'Humpty-Dumpty Budget', just jugglery of words. It is anti-women, anti-farmer, anti-education. The Centre wants to destroy the economic structure of the country

—Mamata Banerjee, WB CM

MHA GETS RS 2.55 L CR

The Union Budget 2026-27 allocated over Rs 2.55 lakh crore to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), a 9.44 per cent rise from Rs 2.33 lakh crore in 2025-26, signalling focus on internal security and policing. Of this, Rs 1.73 lakh crore, nearly 68 per cent, was earmarked for police-related expenditure, including Central Armed Police Forces, border management and policing in Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir.

Capital expenditure under the police head rose sharply to Rs 21,272.47 crore from Rs 16,579.19 crore, underlining emphasis on modernisation and infrastructure.

The Intelligence Bureau (IB) received Rs 6,782.43 crore, up 63 per cent, largely for capacity enhancement. Allocations for CRPF, BSF, ITBP and other forces saw modest increases, while funds were provided for police modernisation. —PTI

Big boost to aircraft & seaplane manufacturing

To support the defence sector, the Budget has waived basic customs duties on all components and raw materials needed to manufacture, maintain, and repair aircraft and aero-engines. Provided that the goods are imported by Public Sector Units under the Ministry of Defence.

These exemptions are part of the tax reforms unveiled by the finance minister to boost the manufacturing sector in the country and will become effective from Monday.

The announcement comes days after the Adani Group and Brazilian multinational aerospace corporation Embraer announced their partnership to set up a regional aircraft manufacturing facility in India.

For the manufacture of civilian, training, and other aircraft, the budget documents state that duty exemptions apply to components or parts

including engines used in aircraft production.

The government also announced a Seaplane Viability Gap Funding scheme to boost domestic manufacturing.

Notably, the Ministry of Civil Aviation's allocation fell 12.4 per cent to Rs 2,102.87 crore from the previous estimate of Rs 2,400.31 crore, but remained above the revised budget. Meanwhile, the government's ambitious regional air connectivity scheme or UDAN, got nearly 27 per cent higher allocation. —PTI

2% OF ENTIRE GDP

Post Op Sindoor, defence budget hiked record 15%

India raised its defence budget to Rs 7,84,678 crore for 2026–27, a sharp 15 per cent increase from Rs 6.81 lakh crore last year. This is amid heightened security challenges from China and Pakistan, particularly following Operation Sindoor.

Defence spending now accounts for 2 per cent of estimated GDP and 14.67 per cent of total Union expenditure, the highest among all ministries. Revenue expenditure has been pegged at Rs 5,53,668 crore.

Of the total allocation, Rs 2,19,306 crore has been earmarked for armed forces, 21.84 per cent higher than the 2025–26 budget estimate. Over Rs 63,733 crore has been allocated for aircraft and aero engines, while Rs 25,023 crore is set aside for the naval fleet.

—PTI

The defence ministry said Rs 1.39 lakh crore — 75 per cent of the capital acquisition budget — will be spent on procurement from domestic industries, underlining the push for indigenisation.

Despite the record allocation, defence stocks fell sharply. The Nifty India Defence index dropped up to 8.86 per cent intraday, with Bharat Dynamics leading losses, down nearly 9 per cent. —PTI

G RAM G GETS ₹ 95,000 CRORE

MGNREGA gets Rs 30K cr as farmers get new AI scheme

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

As the VB-G RAM G scheme is set to be rolled out, the Centre has allocated Rs 95,692.31 crore for it, while an allocation of Rs 30,000 crore has been made for the MGNREGA.

The Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar Aajeevika Mission (Grameen) (VB-G RAM G), which promises 125 days of work in a year, will replace the two-decade-old UPA-era rural employment scheme framed under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005.

The MGNREGA scheme will continue till the VB-G RAM G is implemented, and the pending works are completed, Rural Development Ministry officials have said.

According to the Budget documents, the total allocation for the ministry' Department of Rural Development, is Rs 1,94,368.81 crore, marginally higher than in the last fiscal -- Rs 1,86,995.61 crore, as per the revised estimates.

The allocation for the Department of Land Resources for 2026-27 is Rs 2,654.33. In 2025-26, Rs 2,651 were allocated for this department, while the revised estimate puts the expenditure figure at Rs 1,757.4 crore.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday also announced the launch of Bharat-VISTAAR, a multilingual Artificial Intelligence (AI) platform to strengthen agricultural advisory services. She said the platform will integrate the AgriStack portals and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) package on agricultural practices with AI systems. *—Agencies*

The Centre recently replaced the rural employment MGNREGA scheme with the VB-G-RAM G scheme amid massive backlash *—ANI*

Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh produce most of the country's **sandalwood and coconut.**

Gandhi scheme for textile industry

Sitharaman proposed a 'Mahatma Gandhi Handloom Scheme' to reform the textile industry sector. The scheme aims to strengthen the khadi, handloom, and handicraft sectors. It also aims to provide global market linkages and branding support. The Centre expects it to benefit weavers, village industries, the One District One Product programme, and youth. This comes amid backlash over repealing the MGNREGA.

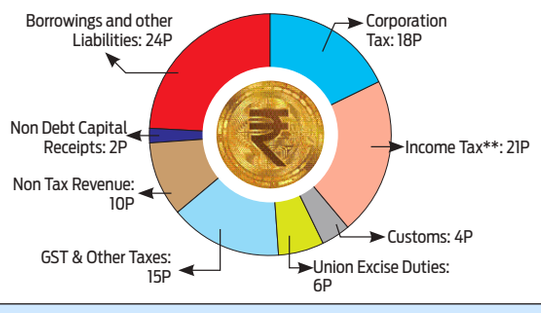
Sandalwood coconut, walnuts, cocoa get boost

Sitharaman proposed a Coconut Promotion Scheme aimed at increasing production and improving productivity to boost India's competitiveness in coconut cultivation. Betting on high-value cash crops, the Centre also announced plans to boost sandalwood, cocoa and cashew nuts.

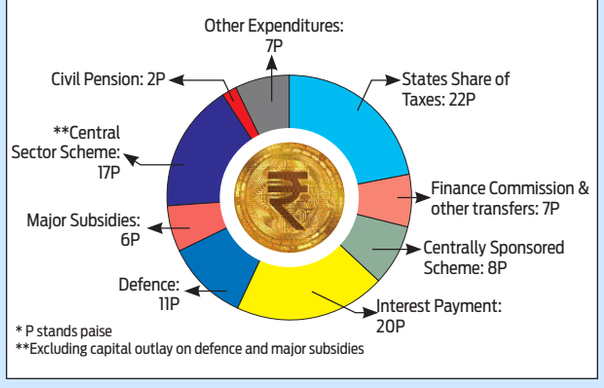
The coconut scheme includes replacing non-productive trees with new saplings. India accounts for roughly 31 per cent of global coconut production. 30 million people depend on coconut cultivation for their livelihoods.

She said that a dedicated programme will transform Indian cashew and cocoa into premium global brands in five years. The Centre will also partner with states to promote sandalwood cultivation. She also anounced a programme for walnuts, almonds and pine nuts, a major boost for J&K. *—ANI*

RUPEE COMES FROM...



RUPEE GOES TO...



* P stands paise
**Excluding capital outlay on defence and major subsidies

Tax relief for accident victims

Any interest awarded by the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal to a natural person will be exempt from income tax and any TDS from this account will be done away with. This move is expected to directly benefit accident victims and their families, ensuring that compensation received is not reduced due to tax deductions.

India to host Global Big Cat summit

India is set to host the first-ever Global Big Cat Summit where Ministers from 95 range countries will deliberate on collective strategies for conservation of big cats, perhaps the only boost for wildlife conservation in the Budget. Notably, India is home to the world's largest population of wild tigers.

Fisheries gets major boost

For fisheries, the government will undertake integrated development of 500 reservoirs and Amrit Sarovars and strengthen the value chain in coastal areas, enabling market linkages through startups, women-led groups and Fish Farmers Producer Organisations.

Fish caught in EEZ, High Seas are tax free

Fish caught by an Indian fishing vessel in Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) or on the High Seas to be made free of duty. Landing of such fish on foreign port will be treated as export of goods.

No excise duty on biogas, CNG

Sitharaman excluded the entire value of biogas while calculating excise duty levy on (biogas) blended compressed natural gas (CNG). This move is expected to boost the profitability of biogas blending. It also promotes the use of cleaner fuels for transportation.

Mega Textile Parks to be set up

As part of a five-prong approach to boost the textile secot, the government announced a Mega Textile Parks to be set up with focus on bringing value addition to technical textiles. It aims to bring in investments, check quality and exports and ensure compliance. Other schemes include the National Fibre Scheme for self-reliance in fibres, Textile Expansion and Employment Scheme to for machinery, National Handloom and Handicraft programme for weavers and artisans and Samarth 2.0 and Tex-Eco Initiative.

Budget cuts customs duties on 17 cancer drugs

The Budget 2026-27 simplified customs regime by rationalising exemptions, waiving customs duty on 17 cancer drugs.

Noting that there are no national institutes for mental health in north India, Sitharaman proposed NIMHANS 2.0 (National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences) in the Ranchi. Mental health institutes in Ranchi (Jharkhand) and Tezpur (Assam) will also be upgraded as regional apex institutions. She said that the government would strengthen and increase capacities of district hospitals by 50 per cent to establish emergency and trauma care centres.

The government also proposed a scheme to help states establish five regional medical hubs in partnership with the private sector to promote India as a prime medical tourism destination. These hubs will serve as integrated healthcare complexes that combine medical, educational and research facilities.

Existing institutions for Allied Healthcare Professionals (AHPs) will be upgraded and new AHP institutions established in private and government sectors.

"This will cover 10 selected disciplines, including Optometry, Radiology, Anaesthesia, OT technology, Applied Psychology and Behavioural Health, and add 100,000 AHPs over the next five years," she said. *—Agencies*

Rs 10,000 cr in biopharma sector to combat diabetes and cancer

Sitharaman proposed Rs 10,000 crore investment in the biopharma sector over the next five years to boost the country's pharmaceuticals industry.

Biopharmaceuticals, or biologics, are complex medicines manufactured from living organisms, cells, or tissues rather than through chemical synthesis. The programme will focus on building a biopharma-centric innovation and manufacturing network, responding to India's rapidly changing disease profile marked by a rising burden of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer and autoimmune disorders.

The strategy will include a Biopharma-focused network with three new National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research and upgrading the seven existing ones, she said. The government will also upgrade AYUSH pharmacies & drug-testing labs and expanding "WHO Global Centre" in Jamnagar. *—Agencies*

7 RARE DISEASE DRUGS NOW DUTY FREE

Drugs, medicines, and special medical foods required for treating seven rare diseases will also be fully exempt from Customs duty. The diseases are: Congenital Hyperinsulinemic Hypoglycemia (CHI), Familial Homozygous Hypercholesterolemia, Alpha Mannosidosis, Primary Hyperoxaluria, Cystinosis, Hereditary Angioedema and Primary Immune Deficiency Disorders.

OVER 1,000 CLINICAL TRIAL SITES

The government will create a network of over 1,000 accredited Indian clinical trial sites. Major clinical trial sites in the country are currently located in big cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Hyderabad.

Tariffs on customs slashed to 10%

The government easing bagging rules and reducing duty from 20 per cent to 10 per cent on goods imported for personal use.

Sitharaman unveiled a "trust-based" customs regime, which will have a single window system for cargo clearances, lesser verification for regular importers with longstanding supply chains, easier duty payment norms for Authorised Economic Operators and use of AI in scanning at ports.

She also announced that honest taxpayers can settle customs disputes by payment of an additional amount, in lieu of penalty, and promised to roll out a Customs Integrated System in two years for all Customs processes. The Budget proposed to revise provisions governing baggage clearance during international travel to address genuine concerns of passengers. The revised rules will enhance duty-free allowances in line with the present day travel realities and provide clarity in temporary carriage of goods brought in or taken out.

Under the Baggage Rules 2016, Indian residents and foreigners residing in India arriving from countries other than Nepal, Bhutan, or Myanmar can bring Rs 50,000 worth of duty-free goods. *—Agencies*

₹1,102 crore for ministers' salaries

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The Union Budget has set aside Rs 1,102 crore towards payment of the Council of Ministers, Cabinet Secretariat and Prime Minister's Office salaries besides entertaining and hospitality of the state guests.

The amount is higher than the revised estimate of Rs 978.20 crore allocated for the purpose in 2025-2026. As against Rs 483.54 crore in 2025-25, a sum of Rs 620 crore has been allotted for expenditure on salaries, sumptuary and other allowances and travel by cabinet ministers, ministers of state and ex-PMs besides for Special Extra Session Flight Operations for VVIPs.

National Security Council has been allocated Rs 256.19 crore, against Rs 279.74 crore in 2025-26, for administrative expenses and space programme of NSC Secretariat. The Cabinet Secretariat gets Rs 80 crore against Rs 78 crore in 2025-26, to meet its and National Authority for Chemical Weapons Convention's administrative expenses.

The PM's Office has been allocated Rs 73.52 crore. The Budget also allotted Rs 5.76 crore for hospitality and entertainment expenses against Rs 6.20 crore in the previous fiscal. Rs 299 crore has been allocated for training government employees abroad. *—PTI*

15 archaeological sites to be experiential spots

Sitharaman has proposed to develop 15 archaeological sites, including Lothal, Dholavira, and Sarnath, into "vibrant, experiential cultural destinations."

Centre will open curated walkways at these sites, including immersive storytelling and technologies to help conservation labs, interpretation centres, and guides.

"I propose to develop 15 archaeological sites, including Lothal, Dholavira, Rakhigarhi, Adichanallur, Sarnath, Hastinapur, and Leh Palace (pic) into vibrant, experiential cultural destinations. Excavated landscapes will be opened to the public through curated walkways." the FM said. She also announced that government would set up a national-level digital grid to "digitally document" all places of significance."This initiative will create a new ecosystem of jobs for local researchers, historians, content creators and technology partners," she said. *—ANI*

ECO TOURISM

New turtle & mountain trails in South and NE

The government announced the development of turtle trails along the coastal areas of Odisha, Karnataka and Kerala.

Uttara Kannada and Dakshina Kannda see an influx of sea turtles during March and December.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the government would establish turtle trails along key nesting sites in the areas.

Sitharaman said, "We will develop ecologically sustainable mountain trails in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu Kashmir, Arakku Valley (Andhra Pradesh) in the Eastern Ghats and Podhigai Malai (Tamil Nadu - Kerala) in the Western Ghats."

The Western Ghats *—ANI*

A birdwatching trail along the Pulicat Lake in Andhra Pradesh-Tamil Nadu border will be developed, she added.

Reacting to the announcement to develop turtle trails along the State's coast. Karnataka Environment Minister Eshwar Khandre said that the Congress has already set a model for this project and taken steps to protect sea turtle eggs and the hatchlings.

NORTH-EASTERN REGION

The Budget proposed a scheme for the development of Buddhist circuits in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura to cover the preservation of temples and monasteries.

The government also announced the development of an East Coast Industrial Corridor with a node at Durgapur, extending it to the North-East, creating five tourism destinations in Purvodaya states, and providing 4,000 e-buses to boost industry, infrastructure and jobs.

The government also announced that it would upskill 10,000 guides in 20 iconic tourism sites and setting up of a National Institute of Hospitality to train professionals. *—Agencies*

By placing biopharma among the seven strategic frontier sectors and launching Biopharma Shakti with an outlay of Rs 10,000 crore over five years, the Union Budget makes a decisive investment in India's health and innovation future

-Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Biocon chief

Many reforms in tax regime especially IT and corporate sector will help boost economy.... Streamlining of Safe Harbour procedure will help the Tax payers... (and) the move to lower tax on Lithium ion will boost the EV motor sector (will help) India become among the top EV manufacturing countries

-KV Suresh Kumar, President of Federation of UN Organised Workers' Union

No release of the announced ₹5,600 crore for the Bhadra Upper Dam project, no declaration of the Krishna Upper Dam as a national project, not even a single effective scheme for farmers... No fair allocation for a state that pays taxes and runs the country, no grants for essential projects. This is not just a budget failure; it's a blow to the spirit of federalism!

-MB Patil, Large and Medium Scale Industries Minister

AI doesn't help farmers: DKS on Budget

Says Bharat-VISTAAR will hurt farmers, adds that Karnataka got no benefits this year

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Sunday criticised the Centre's proposal to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the agricultural sector, saying such measures were unlikely to benefit farmers.

Shivakumar's remarks came after Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech announced the launch of Bharat-VISTAAR, a multilingual AI-based platform seeking to integrate AgriStack portals and the ICAR package on agricultural practices with AI systems.

The Centre's initiative aims to boost farm productivity, support better decision-making by farmers and reduce risks through customised advisory services. Shivakumar claimed that the AI does not help agriculture.

"They (the Centre) are talking about using AI even in MGNREGA to decide wages. But they did not pay wages during the agricultural season. AI does not benefit agriculture. What farmers need is real support," he said.

The initiative aims to boost farm productivity, support decision-making and reduce rists through customised advisory services —PTI

Shivakumar questioned the Centre's alleged failure to increase sugar price. He stressed that farmers should instead be encouraged to take up silk production.

"Farmers are suffering huge losses. If the sugar price is not increased then the cooperative sector will be on the verge of closure. Sugarcane is grown in five districts of the state. Even after eight to nine years, the sugar price has not been increased," he charged.

On the proposed high-speed train for Bengaluru, Shivakumar expressed doubts over its feasibility.

"No high-speed train will come. The 50:50 funding model will not work. We are ready for a 90:10 model, with the Centre contributing 90 per cent and the state 10 per cent. They have done this for other states and must do the same for Karnataka," he said.—*ANI*

BJP says Budget is pro-farmer; MSME boost to help City

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

BJP Leader R Ashoka hailed the Union Budget, saying that agriculture received a special emphasis "through targeted interventions aimed at enhancing farmers' income and rural prosperity".

He said that the Mahatma Gandhi Gram Swaraj Scheme to promote khadi and handloom products and the special packages for coconut, sandalwood and cashew cultivation, and the ambitious goal of positioning cashew and cocoa as global export products by 2030 reflects a long-term vision for sustainable agricultural growth.

Union Minister of New and Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi also hailed the Basic Customs Duty (BCD) exemption on capital goods used to manufacture lithium-ion cells batteries. —*Agencies*

Anti-farmer, injustice to K'taka: Farmers slam Budget

KOLAR/MYSURU, 1 FEB

Various farmers criticised the Union Budget, terming it "anti-farmer". They said that apart from the Centre pushing for various high-value crops, there was no major announcement for farmers.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman announced proposals to boost coconut, cashew, sandalwood, agarwood, and walnuts. The State is one of the nation's largest producers of coconut and sandalwood and has significant cashew production as well.

However, Kurubur Shanthakumar, Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers Association president and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) South India convener, noted that SKM and various farmer organisations had held massive protests demanding a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP).

"But there is no mention in the Budget," he told Salar News. Similarly, there was no mention of insurance cover for crop losses, he added.

He noted that there was no mentioned of better price for sugarcane despite massive protests.

The Centre has "meted injustice to Karnataka," Badagalapura Nagendra, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha and Hasiru Sene State Unit President told Salar News.

He noted that despite southern states paying among the high tax, there was no major announcement for Southern India.

However, the Centre "allocated sufficient grants and schemes to its NDA partner states," he added.

The budget had allocated Rs 1,62,671 crore for agriculture and allied activities. However, Nagendra noted that there was no major announcement for the improvement of rural infrastructure.

"Sops to fishery sector is a step in the right direction," Nalini Gowda, President of the Kolar district Farmer Sangha Women Wing told Salar News.

The Centre exempted tax from fisheries. —*Salar News*

No tax relief for middle class: Trade activist

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

The Union Budget for 2026-27 does not provide tax relief to the middle class that people had hoped for given the rising inflation through the last year, said trade activist Sajjan Raj Mehta.

"Generally, the third budget of a government is expected to bring about some major, unexpected, and bold reforms," he said on Sunday. "But the Budget does not meet that expectation... The public deserved the relief," Mehta said to Salar News.

He noted that there were some positive initiatives in the budget, namely in the employment and export-oriented sectors.

"Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has proposed a five-pillar integrated program for the employment-intensive textile sector, keeping in mind the possibilities of a European Free Trade Agreement. The aim is to accelerate self-reliance, modernisation, and job creation," he said.

He said that the schemes were positive sign for handloom, Khadi, MSMEs, and rural-based textile units.

He said that, the announcement of seven high-speed rail corridors was welcome as it would help boost the infrastructure, but the neglect of extremely important business corridors like Mumbai-Bengaluru was disappointing. Their development must be prioritised."

"Overall, this budget is focused on structural reforms and long-term vision, but expectations for immediate relief for the common taxpayer and businessmen remain unfulfilled," he said—*Salar News*

Two killed, 3 critical as car hits tipper in Mandya

MANDYA, 1 FEB

Two brothers were killed and three others critically injured after their car rammed into a tipper truck parked on the roadside on National Highway 150 near Begamangala in Nagamangala taluk of Mandya district on Sunday. Police identified the deceased as Mobin, 20, and Shyam, 22, residents of Bengaluru. Their mother, Shilashree, Shyam's daughter Heenashree, and the car driver, Nichethan, sustained critical injuries. The injured were rushed to Adichunchanagiri Hospital near Bellur, where they are undergoing treatment. Police said the collision occurred when the car hit the stationary tipper truck under circumstances yet to be ascertained. A case was registered.—*SALAR NEWS*

Mysuru jeweller held for cheating customers of gold

MYSURU, 1 FEB

Mysuru police on Sunday arrested a jeweller for allegedly cheating customers and looting gold ornaments worth several lakhs from his residence in Vijayanagar. The accused was identified as Yogesh, owner of Star Gold Company, who ran a jewellery shop near Trinetra Circle in the Vijayanagar area. Police said he lured customers by offering the lowest interest rates for pledging gold ornaments. Around 15 customers pledged about 850 grams of gold at the shop. Investigators alleged Yogesh melted the pledged ornaments and sold the gold to others. After complaints, police registered a case, arrested Yogesh and produced him before a court that remanded him to judicial custody—*SALAR NEWS*

3 arrested for extorting friend in Hebbagodi

HEBBAGODI, 1 FEB

Hebbagodi Police in the State have arrested three individuals for attempting to extort Rs 50,000 from a goods vehicle driver in H Hosahalli. The complainant, who sold his vehicle to buy a cab, was abducted and assaulted on 30 January. The accused, friends of the victim, took him to an isolated area, where they assaulted him with a hockey stick, robbed Rs 1,500, and demanded an additional Rs 50,000, threatening to kill him. The police swiftly apprehended the suspects near their residence on 31 January and seized the cash. During interrogation, they confessed to the crime, motivated by the intention to steal the money the victim had obtained from selling his vehicle.—*ANI*

AGAINST PRASHAD SCHEME

Hundreds of activists, including matriarch of the Mysuru royal family, Pramoda Devi Wadiyar, marched to protest against development activities at Chamundi Hills on Sunday —*SALAR NEWS*

Promoda Devi marches against Chamundi Hills' 'concretisation'

MYSURU, 1 FEB

Hundreds of activists, including children, climbed the steps to Chamundi Hills in Mysuru on Sunday to stage a protest against the ongoing Pilgrimage Rejuvenation, Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) works.

The much revered Chamundeshwari Temple is located atop the Chamundi Hills.

Lending her support to the agitation against the conservation activities at the Chaumundi Hills, matriarch of the Mysuru royal family, Pramoda Devi Wadiyar also participated in the protest. The protesters, holding placards and shouting slogans, demanded that the immediate suspension of the ongoing works.

- Lending her support to the agitation against the conservation activities at the Chaumundi Hills, matriarch of the Mysuru royal family, Pramoda Devi Wadiyar also participated in the protest. The protesters carried placards and shouting slogans.

Members of the Chamundi Betta Ulisi Horata Samithi and other activists have organised a series of protests in opposition of the concretisation activities and other development works here.

They urged to safeguard its heritage and fragile environment, and opposed the increasing "commercialisation and ecological degradation" of the area.

They alleged that the increasing development works, which have been initiated at a cost of Rs 62 crore, will result in the creation of a concrete jungle of the hills.

One of the protesters on condition of anonimity said, "Since Chamundi Hills was declared a heritage site in the Mysuru master plan, prior approval from the Heritage Committee should have been obtained before undertaking such activities." —*Salar News*

Realtor CJ Roy's last rites performed, SIT begins probe

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Sunday said that an SIT has begun its probe into the death of CJ Roy, founder and chairman of the Confident Group.

Meanwhile, the last rites of the real estate tycoon, who was found dead at his office on 30 January with bullet injuries, were performed on Sunday in the presence of family members, friends and admirers.

He allegedly died by suicide amid income tax raids at his premises.A native of Kerala, he was laid to rest at Confident Cascade near Bannerghatta here.

The SIT is being led by joint commissioner of police, Vamshi Krishna.

On allegations by some Congress leaders that agencies like IT, ED and CBI were being misused by the Centre, and whether there were any links to upcoming polls in Kerala, he said, "without knowing, we cannot say anything. Let the probe report come."

An unnatural death report was registered in the case.

His brother CJ Babu said Roy had last called him 30 January to enquire about his return from Thailand and had not mention the IT raids. Roy's son Rohit said, "I am not sure what caused his death....." —*PTI*

The last rites of Confident Group chairman CJ Roy being held at Nature's Cascade in Bengaluru on Sunday —MOHAMMED ASAD

Actor Jayamala elected KFCC Prez for 2025–26

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

Actor and former minister Jayamala was elected President of the Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce (KFCC), defeating producer BM Harish, with the chamber announcing results of its 2025–26 elections on Saturday.

Jayamala, a senior figure in the Kannada film industry, has had a long career spanning acting, film production and industry-related public service. She has also served as minister for women and child development in the JD(S)-Congress coalition government and as chairperson of the Karnataka State Commission for Women.

According to the results declared by KFCC, Sunder Rajan MK was elected vice president (producer), while Manju K won the VP (distributor) post. Kishore Kumar MN was elected VP (exhibitor).

Ramesh Babu MR, was elected honorary secretary (distributor), and Ashok KC elected honorary secretary. Jayasimha Musuri BK was elected as the treasurer. —*PTI*

Muslims partake in Hindu festivities in Kolar

CHINTAMANI, 1 FEB

In one of the best examples of communal harmony, people from the minority community on Sunday joined in at the Hindu Samajothsava celebrations at Chintamani in Kolar district. They offered fruits and refreshments to their Hindu brethren, who were taking part in the Shobha Yathra.

As the procession arrived at Gajanana circle area in Chintamani, dozens of Muslim minority people led by social worker Towfiq showered flower petals on the participants.

Towfiq said though religious practices differ, the theme of both Hindu and Muslims religions are the same and one should respect the practices of the other as our country stands on the principle of unity in diversity and live in a harmonious manner. —*Salar News*

BOOST FOR ENTREPRENEURS

AgriWalk in Cubbon spotlights farmer empowerment

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

AgriWalk held here on Sunday drew thousands of citizens to Cubbon Park, as the Karnataka Agriculture Department highlighted the need to move farming beyond production and empower farmers as entrepreneurs, officials said.

Organised as a pre-event to the International Trade Fair 2026, the walk was held under the theme 'A Walk for Empowering Farmers', focusing on value addition, processing, branding and sustainable practices to improve farm incomes.

Agriculture Minister N Cheluvarayaswamy flagged off the walk near the Cubbon Park Bandstand. Starting at 6am, the route passed through Queens Road, Vidhana Soudha, BBMP Tower, UB City Signal and Vittal Mallya Road, before concluding at the Bandstand.

Nearly 4,000 participants, including children, youth, women and senior citizens, registered for the event, reflecting growing interest in food systems, farmer welfare and healthy lifestyles. A Zumba session was held as a warm-up activity before the walk.

Cheluvarayaswamy said India's agricultural strategy is shifting from production to profitability, stressing value addition, branding and market linkages. "The challenge now is ensuring farmers earn more by processing produce and accessing markets," he said.

The minister said the 6–8 February fair at Palace Grounds will connect farmers with technology, branding opportunities and markets. Over 300 stalls will showcase machinery, processing techniques and innovations across the value chain. —*PTI*

SC to hear plea on Wangchuk's arrest today

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday a plea filed by Gitanjali J Angmo, the wife of jailed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, against his detention under the National Security Act. A bench of Justice Aravind Kumar and Justice P B Varale is likely to hear the matter. On 29 January, Wangchuk, who is under detention in Jodhpur Central Jail, denied allegations that he made a statement to overthrow the government through an Arab Spring type movement and emphasised that he has the right to criticise and protest peacefully. Advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Wangchuk's wife, submitted that police relied on select videos to mislead the detaining authority. — *PTI*

Magh Purnima: 2.10 crore people bathe in Ganga

PRAYAGRAJ, 1 FEB

Around 2.10 crore devotees took a dip in the Ganga and at the Sangam on the occasion of Magh Purnima here on Sunday, braving severe cold wave, officials said. Devotees began arriving from midnight, and by 12 noon nearly 1.5 crore pilgrims had conducted the ritual bathing in the Ganga and at the confluence. District Magistrate Manish Kumar said even though there was dense fog in the morning, large numbers of devotees continued to arrive and bathing was being conducted at all the dedicated ghats. —*PTI*

Palghar cops find man missing for 10 years

PALGHAR, 1 FEB

A man who left his home in Palghar in 2016 has been reunited with his parents thanks to the efforts of the police, an official said. Praveen Pawar, now 39, was traced to Delhi on Saturday. "He is a resident of Ahilyanagar. While working in a hospital in Vikramgadh here, he had a dispute with his parents and left home in 2016. He was untraceable. Under Operation Muskan-14, a special campaign implemented by Palghar Superintendent of Police Yatish Deshmukh, police teams began checking cold cases of missing children and adults," he said."Utilising leads from technical investigation and social media traces, we located Pawar in Delhi. His family is overjoyed," Wada inspector Dattatray said. —*PTI*

KCR appears before SIT in tapping case

HYDERABAD, 1 FEB

Former Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao appeared before the Telangana Police SIT at his Nandini Nagar residence in Hyderabad. The questioning relates to allegations of illegal phone surveillance during the BRS government. Rao left his farmhouse in Yerravalli earlier and arrived at his residence, where heavy police deployment and barricades were in place. Rao's lawyer requested his legal representative be present. KTR, the BRS Working President, was also present. The case involves unauthorised phone tapping of politicians, journalists, and others. Rao's arguments and appearances by family members were also noted. —*PTI*

India to buy Venezuelan oil instead of Iranian: Trump

US Prez now telling us what our govt is doing: Congress

NEW YORK, 1 FEB

US President Donald Trump has claimed that India will be purchasing oil from Venezuela instead of Iran.

Trump was speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One while flying to Palm Beach in Florida on Saturday

Responding to a question on whether China would recover the money it had lent to Venezuela in exchange for oil supplies he said, "China is welcome to make a deal on oil. We've already made a deal. India is coming in, and they're going to be buying Venezuelan oil instead of Iran. So we've already made that deal," he said.

There was no immediate reaction from New Delhi on Trump's comments.

India had been a major buyer of Iranian oil till 2019, when imports were reduced after the re-imposition of US sanctions on Tehran.

Trump's comments come against the backdrop of US sanctions on Iran and Venezuela and its pressure on major oil importers to avoid buying crude from nations under restrictions.

India had been a major customer of Iranian crude oil till 2019 when imports were reduced after the re-imposition of US sanctions by President Donald Trump — *PTI*

In recent years, India increased its purchases of discounted Russian crude, making Russia one of its largest oil suppliers.

The US has imposed 50 per cent tariffs on India, including 25 per cent for its purchases of Russian oil.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Modi on Friday talked to Venezuela's Acting President Delcy Rodríguez and they agreed to deepen ties.

Meanwhile, the Congress took a swipe at the Modi government over President Trump's remarks that India is going to buy oil from Venezuela instead of Iran, saying the American leader continues to give "information on what our own government has done or will be doing."

The Congress's general secretary in-charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh shared the audio of Trump's remarks on X. "Trump told us Op Sindoor had been halted. He told us India had stopped buying Russian oil. And now this," the Congress leader said. —*PTI*

HONOURING THE DEAD

Ajit's death: Fadnavis to skip local poll campaign

MUMBAI, 1 FEB

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has decided not to campaign for the Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti elections in view of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's death in a plane crash, officials said.

He communicated his decision on Saturday, instructing local party leaders to campaign for the polls scheduled for February 7, while he will not take part in any election-related events.

Twelve Zilla Parishads and 125 Panchayat Samitis in the state will go to the polls on 7 February, and campaigning will end on 5 February.

The chief minister was earlier expected to address 22 meetings in seven days, but decided to cancel them due to Pawar's demise.

The State Election Commission has revised the election schedule, considering the three-day state mourning announced after the death of Pawar and four others.

As per the revised programme, polling originally slated for 5 February will now be held on 7 February, while the counting of votes will take place on 9 February.

Meanwhile, the NCP's Maharashtra president, Sunil Tatkare, said his party will continue to be part of the BJP-led NDA, asserting that the organisation will move forward as per the ideology and path shown by the late Ajit Pawar.

His statement came amid claims that 12 February had been fixed as the date for the announcement of the merger between the NCP and NCP (SP), around two-and-half years after the Sharad Pawar-founded party split following Ajit Pawar's switch to the NDA — *PTI*

Pakistan army soldiers conducting operations in Balochistan — *PTI*

Indian spokesman Randhir Jaiswal — *PTI*

Balochistan: India rejects Pak charges

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

India categorically rejected as baseless Pakistan's allegations of an Indian hand in the attempts to disturb peace in Balochistan, and said it is Islamabad's usual tactic to deflect attention from its "internal failings."

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, trashing the charges, also highlighted Pakistan's record of suppression, brutality and violation of human rights.

Jaiswal was responding to Pakistan military's claim that India was supporting terrorist elements in their attempts to disturb peace in Balochistan. "Instead of parroting frivolous claims each time there is a violent incident, it would do better to focus on addressing long-standing demands of its people in the region. Its record of brutality and violation of human rights is well known," he added.

At least 15 Pakistani soldiers and 92 militants were killed in counter-terrorism operations carried out by Pakistani security forces in Balochistan, the Pakistan army said. The operations were launched after Baloch groups carried out attacks on Saturday, it said in a statement.

The Pakistan army said the militants attempted to disturb peace by carrying out terrorist attacks in and around Quetta. — *PTI*

Deepam row: Cases filed over defamatory remarks

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The Tamil Nadu Director General of Police (DGP) has told the Supreme Court that legal action has been taken against the protesters who allegedly made caste and religion-based defamatory remarks against Justice GR Swaminathan of the Madras High Court.

The remarks were made following the judge's order allowing the lighting of the Karthigai Deepam oil lamp at the Thirupparankundram hill in Madurai.

In an affidavit, DGP G Venkataraman said cases have been registered and instructions issued to all district superintendents of police to prevent the publication or circulation of any material that scandalises the court or its judges.

The Karthigai Deepam oil lamp burning on the Thirupparankundram Hill in Madurai —*PTI*

He said the Greater Chennai Police acted on complaints regarding abusive and contemptuous content circulated on social media platforms, including X, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp.

The Cyber Crime Cell of the Central Crime Branch identified nine social media handles involved in sharing the objectionable content and has sent requests to social media intermediaries seeking removal of the posts, blocking of accounts, and preservation of URLs and disclosure of user identities for legal action.

- The remarks were made following the judge's order allowing the lighting of the Karthigai Deepam oil lamp at the Thirupparankundram Hill in Madurai

HResponses from the platforms are awaited.

The submissions were made in response to a plea filed by advocate GS Mani, who alleged that some DMK-supported and Left-affiliated groups, along with certain individuals and lawyers, staged illegal protests, including within court premises, and made contemptuous remarks against Justice Swaminathan. —*PTI*

Gang fleecing Rajasthan bus conductors busted

KOTA, 1 FEB

Police busted a syndicate which was allegedly extorting money from Rajasthan Roadways bus conductors by forcing them to charge passengers without issuing tickets. They also offered conductors protection from vigilance checks, officials said.

Jhalawar Police carried out raids across 12 districts and arrested eight people, including the gang leader, Narendra Singh Rajawat, an independent ward councillor in Jhalawar.

With this, the decades-long operations of the gang, which has caused substantial loss to the state transport corporation, has been dismantled, they said.

As part of 'Operation Clean Ride', police also captured the exchange of money on video in a sting operation, a senior officer said on Saturday.

As the gang used pass on messages regarding vigilance teams to bus conductors through STD phone booths in the early days of its operation, it came be known as the 'STD Gang.' — PTI

New antidote found for Celphos pesticide

CHANDIGARH, 1 FEB

Doctors at the PGIMER here have reported a major breakthrough in the treatment of aluminium phosphide poisoning. The poison commonly known as Celphos, is a lethal pesticide, officials said on Sunday.

The research, conducted in the Department of Internal Medicine at Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), is the first clinical study to demonstrate the effectiveness of intravenous lipid emulsion as a novel life-saving therapy in this otherwise highly fatal condition, a PGIMER statement said. The findings have been published in the international journal 'European Review of Medical and Pharmacological Sciences.'

The study was carried out under the guidance of Dr Sanjay Jain, Dean (Academics), Professor and Head of the Department of Internal Medicine, PGIMER, whose leadership in emergency care played a crucial role in the management of these critically ill patients.

The research was funded by the Medical Education and Research Cell, PGIMER, underlining the institute's strong institutional support for socially impactful research.

This randomised clinical study was led by Dr Mandip Singh Bhatia, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine, PGIMER, who served as the primary investigator.

"Patients who received intravenous lipid emulsion in addition to standard treatment showed a marked reduction in mortality, along with faster correction of metabolic acidosis, improved hemodynamic stability and better outcomes in critically ill patients, including those with cardiac complications. —*PTI*

Modi renames Adampur airport after Guru Ravidass

JALANDHAR, 1 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared the new name of the Adampur airport here as Sri Guru Ravidass Maharaj Ji Airport and also virtually inaugurated the terminal building at the Halwara airport in Ludhiana.

The prime minister reached the Adampur airport at around 3.45 pm from Delhi after the presentation of the Union Budget in Parliament.

Modi would also be visiting Dera Sachkhand Ballan here on the occasion of the 649th birth anniversary of Guru Ravidas.

Meanwhile, the PM virtually inaugurated the terminal building of the Halwara airport in Ludhiana, which will improve aviation infrastructure in Punjab.

Developed at the Indian Air Force base at Halwara in Raikot subdivision, the civil terminal is expected to enhance air connectivity and boost economic growth in the region.The terminal building is a Rs 54.67-crore joint venture between the Punjab government and the AAI. —*PTI*

CONGRESS ASKS MODI TO COME CLEAN ON EPSTEIN 'DISCLOSURES'

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The Congress on Sunday demanded answers from Narendra Modi after the "disclosures" in the Epstein files that some "monsters" had access to him, and said the prime minister should come clean on the issue.

The Congress general secretary in charge of organisation, K C Venugopal, said in a post on X, "The reports of the new batch of Epstein Files are a huge wake-up call about the kind of monsters who have access to Modi, and how susceptible he is to foreign manipulation. The Congress demands that the PM come clean on these disclosures that raise serious questions."

"Has he met Epstein? Or did he send someone to meet him? What did his conversations with Epstein involve," the Congress leader asked.

The Epstein files are documents related to two investigations into sex trafficking by financier Jeffrey Epstein and his accomplice Maxwell, including travel logs, voice recordings and emails. — PTI

ATTEMPT TO MURDER CASE

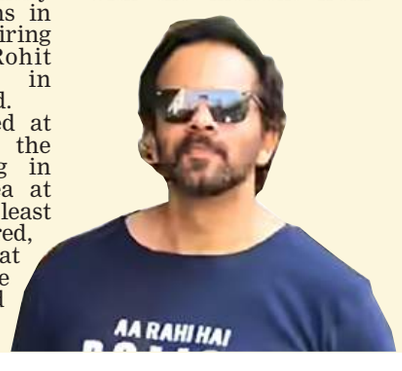
Four held for firing at filmmaker Rohit Shetty's Mumbai home

PUNE, 1 FEB

The Pune police on Sunday detained four persons in connection with the firing at filmmaker Rohit Shetty's residence in Mumbai, officials said.

The assailants fired at the first floor of the nine-storey building in Mumbai's Juhu area at around 12.45 am. At least five rounds were fired, they said, adding that one bullet struck the glass of a gym located in the building.

Four persons were detained in connection with the incident from Karvenagar and Dhayari areas in Pune city in an operation carried out by personnel from the Warje Malwadi police station, an official said. Further probe is on, the official said. After the incident, a forensic science and ballistics expert team reached the spot to collect evidence. The Mumbai police have registered a case on charges of attempt to murder under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita as well as provisions of the Arms Act. —*PTI*



TTD EO transferred after SIT chargesheet in adulteration case

AMARAVATI, 1 FEB

A week after a Special Investigation Team filed a chargesheet in a Tirupati court over alleged ghee adulteration during the previous YSRCP regime, the Andhra Pradesh government has transferred Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Executive Officer Anil Kumar Singhal.

The 1993-batch IAS officer, who served as TTD EO between May 2017 and October 2020 under the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy government, has been directed to report to the General Administration Department for further posting. A government order issued on Sunday said Singhal was replaced by Muddada Ravichandra.

In its chargesheet, the SIT said a committee was formed in April 2019, with the then EO's approval, to revise ghee tender conditions. The TTD Board approved the recommendations in February 2020, leading to relaxed norms.

Investigators said the changes enabled private dairies, including inexperienced ones to secure contracts, compromising ghee quality used for laddu prasadam.

Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav said NDDB reports indicated possible animal fat presence, adding evidence showed adulteration began after 2019.

He said the Chief Minister had cited the findings while addressing the issue publicly earlier recently. —*PTI*

-PTI

5 wounded in Mardi Gras parade shooting in US

CLINTON, 1 FEB

Five people, including a six-year-old child, have been wounded in a shooting during a parade in Louisiana. The shooting occurred shortly after the midday start of the Mardi Gras in the Country parade in Clinton. East Feliciana sheriff Jeff Travis told reporters that three people in the area who were found with firearms were taken into custody, but that it is unclear whether they were involved in the shooting. The Louisiana governor, Jeff Landry, reacted to the shooting in a post on X, calling it "absolutely horrific and unacceptable" and urging the public to pray for the victims an families. Clinton has a population of about 1,300 people. It is part of the metropolitan area surrounding Louisiana's capital city, Baton Rouge. —*AGENCIES*

Xi pushes for stronger yuan to rival dollar

BEIJING, 1 FEB

Chinese President Xi Jinping has called for building a "strong currency" to expand the global use of the yuan and elevate it to international reserve status. A move widely seen as challenging the dominance of the US dollar. In an article published in the Communist Party journal Qiushi, President Xi said the yuan should be widely used in global trade, investment and foreign exchange markets. China has been accelerating the use of its currency in overseas trade, settling nearly one-third of its USD 6.2 trillion foreign trade in yuan last year. China has also promoted alternatives to the SWIFT system, expanded yuan trade with Russia, and signed currency swap agreements with around 50 countries to reduce reliance on the dollar. —*PTI*

Zelenskyy confirms new round of peace talks

KYIV, 1 FEB

The next round of peace talks between Russia and Ukraine will take place on 4 February and 5 February, in Abu Dhabi, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced on Sunday. The meetings are expected to include envoys from Ukraine, Russia and the US as part of a trilateral effort to end Moscow's nearly four-year full-scale invasion. In a Telegram post, Zelenskyy said Ukraine was ready for "substantive talks" and was seeking a "real and dignified end to the war". There was no immediate confirmation from US or Russian officials. However, Russia's top negotiator Kirill Dmitriev said on Saturday that he had held a "constructive" meeting with the US peace delegation in Florida. While both Moscow and Kyiv have signalled willingness to compromise, major disagreements remain. A central issue is whether Russia should withdraw from occupied Ukrainian territories. Meanwhile, hostilities continued on the ground. Russian attack drones struck a maternity hospital in the southern city of Zaporizhzhia on Sunday, wounding three women and causing a fire that was later extinguished. Despite claims of a temporary halt on strikes against major cities, Russia launched 90 drones overnight, with several hitting targets across the country of Ukraine. Two people were killed in Dnipro, while a 59-year-old woman was seriously wounded in shelling in Kherson. Recent strikes have also damaged energy infrastructure in Odesa and Kharkiv, underscoring the fragile nature of the ceasefire efforts. —*PTI*

145 militants, 17 soldiers killed in Balochistan ops

China & UN warn Pak over rising threats from Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD/ BEIJING, 1 FEB

Hospital workers transport a body of a police officer who was killed in a militants attack, at a hospital in Quetta, Pakistan, Saturday —*PTI*

At least 17 Pakistani soldiers and 145 militants were killed in counter-terrorism operations in the Balochistan province of Pakistan, the provincial chief minister said to Dawn on Sunday.

Meanwhile, China and the United Nations have both sounded warnings this week to Pakistan over its growing spillover of terrorist threats from Afghanistan and about militant violence affecting the country.

The army said the militants also targeted civilians, killing 18 people, including women, children, the elderly and labourers, while 15 soldiers died during clearance operations and ensuing gun battles.

The operations were launched after militants belonging to ethnic Baloch groups carried out attacks at several locations on Saturday, the army said in a statement on Sunday.

The army said the militants attempted to disturb peace by carrying out terrorist activities in and around Quetta, Mastung, Nushki, Dalbandin, Kharan, Panjgur, Tump, Gwadar and Pasni.

On Friday, 41 militants belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were killed in separate security operations in Panjgur and Harnai districts.

Sanitisation operations are continuing in the affected areas, the army statement said.

The army also announced that the counter-terrorism campaign, approved by the Federal Apex Committee under the National Action Plan, would continue at full pace to eliminate militancy from the country.

The Federal Apex Committee is the top-level body tasked with tackling militancy, while the National Action Plan is Pakistan's comprehensive strategy to combat terrorism.

Just a day ago, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned Pakistan about threats coming from Afghanistan, while he was in New York. He said the UN remained committed to four key objectives in Afghanistan, while voicing frustration over the Taliban's failure to make progress on inclusivity, human rights and security. —*Agencies*

CEASEFIRE PHASE 2

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would allow 50 patients a day to leave, each accompanied by two relatives —*x*

Rafah border partially reopens

CAIRO, 1 FEB

Gaza's Rafah border crossing with Egypt was busy on Sunday as Israel allowed limited travel to and from the territory, after years of near-complete isolation.

Reopening the border crossing is a key step as the Israel-Hamas ceasefire plan moves ahead. Rafah, seen by Palestinians as Gaza's gateway to the world, has been largely shut since Israel seized it in May 2024.

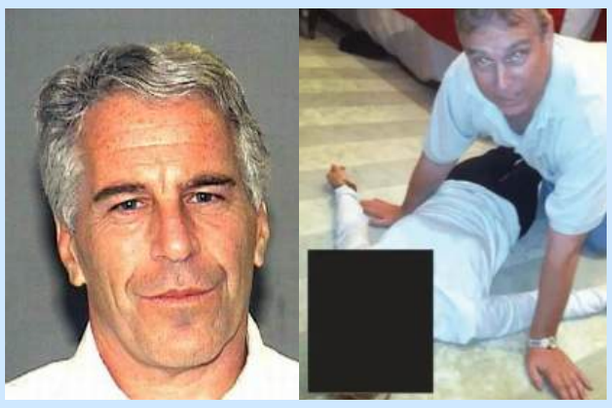
The head of Gaza's new administrative committee said two-way travel would begin on Monday. COGAT, Israel's military and aid providing agency said the crossing was being prepared for fuller operations.

Israel has said it, and Egypt will vet people for exit and entry through the crossing, which will be supervised by European Union border patrol agents.

Few people will initially be allowed to cross, with no goods permitted. Around 20,000 Palestinians needing medical care hope to leave Gaza, while thousands abroad are seeking to return.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would allow 50 patients a day to leave, each accompanied by two relatives, while about 50 people who left Gaza during the war would be allowed to return daily.

Before the war, Rafah was Gaza's main crossing for passenger travel. While the territory has four other crossings shared with Israel, the ceasefire terms place the area between Rafah and populated zones under Israeli military control. —*PTI*



Former UK prince Andrew seen kneeling over an unidentified woman in a photo from the Epstein files released 30 Jan —*SCREENGRA*

Epstein files: Ex-UN official quits, ex-prince must talk

NEW YORK, 1 FEB

Newly disclosed US government files on Jeffrey Epstein have prompted the resignation of a top official in Slovakia and revived calls in Britain for a former prince to share what he knows with authorities about Epstein's links to powerful individuals around the world.

The disclosures have also revived questions about whether long-time Epstein friend Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, formerly known as Prince Andrew, should cooperate with US authorities investigating Epstein.

The fallout comes just a day after the Department of Justice began releasing a massive trove of files that offers more details about Epstein's interactions with the rich and famous after he served time for sex crimes in Florida.

The prime minister of Slovakia accepted the resignation on Saturday of an official, Miroslav Lajcak, who once had a yearlong term as president of the UN General Assembly. Lajcak wasn't accused of wrongdoing but left his position after photos and emails revealed he had met with Epstein in the years after Epstein was released from jail.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Saturday suggested Mountbatten-Windsor should tell American investigators whatever he knows about Epstein's activities.

The FBI started investigating Epstein in July 2006 and agents expected him to be indicted in May 2007, according to the newly records released.

A prosecutor wrote up a proposed indictment after multiple underage girls told police and the FBI that they had been paid to give Epstein sexualized massages. —*PTI*

Khamenei warns US attack would trigger 'regional war'

DUBAI/TEHRAN, 1 FEB

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said that the country would not instigate an attack but would deliver a blow if attacked —*PTI*

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has warned that any US attack would ignite a "regional war" in the Middle East.

Speaking amid the presence of US warships, including the USS Abraham Lincoln, in the Arabian Sea, Khamenei stated, "The Americans should know that if they start a war, this time it will be a regional war." He also described recent protests as "a coup," with tens of thousands detained since 28 December, initially over Iran's currency collapse, which has become a direct challenge to his rule.

Iran had planned a live-fire drill in the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic route for global oil trade, despite warnings from the US military against threats to vessels.

Khamenei emphasised, "We are not the instigators and we do not seek to attack any country. But the Iranian nation will deliver a blow to anyone who attacks or harasses it."

Iran declares EU militaries as terrorist groups

Meanwhile, Iran's parliament declared all European Union militaries as terrorist groups, criticising the EU's designation of Iran's Revolutionary Guard over its crackdown on protests. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf criticised Europe's "blind obedience to the Americans," and lawmakers chanted "Death to America" and "Death to Israel."

Tehran claims "structural arrangements for negotiations are progressing," despite no direct talks yet, amid rising regional tensions. —*Agencies*

330 int'l observers confirmed for B'desh Feb polls

DHAKA, 1 FEB

A total of 330 international observers have confirmed for Bangladesh's 13th general election and the July National Charter, are both scheduled in February, the Chief Adviser's Press Wing said on Saturday. The statement said several invited countries, including India, are yet to confirm delegates.

Six international organisations have agreed to deploy at least 63 observers. They will join missions from the European Union, 16 countries and 32 individual observers affiliated with international bodies.

The number of confirmed observers is more than double that of the January 2024 elections. Official data show 158 observers attended the 12th election. The OIC mission, led by Shakir Mahmood Bandar, will include two members. Others include ANFREL, the Commonwealth Secretariat, IRI, and NDI. —*ANI*

US, Cuba to talk amid oil supply squeeze

US President Donald Trump has 'predicted' that the Cuban government is ready to fall —*PTI*

AIR FORCE ONE, 1 FEB

President Donald Trump said the US was beginning to talk with Cuban leaders as his administration puts greater pressure and cutting off key oil supplies.

Trump made the comment to reporters on Saturday night as he was flying to Florida. It comes in the wake of his moves to cut off supplies of oil from Venezuela and Mexico, which he suggested Saturday would force Cuba to negotiate

His goals with Cuba remain unclear, but Trump has turned more of his attention toward the island after his administration in early January captured Venezuela's then-President Nicolas Maduro and has been more aggressive in confronting nations that are adversaries of the US.

Trump has predicted that the Cuban government is ready to fall.

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez on Saturday (local time) strongly condemned the United States' latest move to impose tariffs on countries supplying oil to the island, warning that the measures aim to "strangle" Cuba's economy.

Trump's most recent moves to cut off Cuba's oil supplies have squeezed the island. –*ANI*

FROM EAST TO WEST COAST

Surge in US protests against ICE

WASHINGTON DC, 1 FEB

Massive crowds of protesters marched from coast to coast for a second consecutive day in the United States —*ANI*

Massive crowds of protesters marched from coast to coast for a second consecutive day in the US, calling for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to leave their cities.

The protests coincided with a legal setback for Minnesota, after a federal judge on Saturday allowed the immigration enforcement operation known as Operation Metro Surge to continue while a lawsuit brought by the state and the cities of Minneapolis and St Paul proceeds.

While acknowledging evidence that federal agents had "engaged in racial profiling, excessive use of force, and other harmful actions," the judge said the harms of halting the entire operation had to be weighed against the federal government's responsibility to enforce immigration law.

Minnesota officials argued that the deployment of thousands of federal agents was unconstitutional, alleging warrantless arrests and excessive force. The Trump administration said the lawsuit was an overreach.

As protests intensified, President Donald Trump said on Saturday that he had instructed Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem not to intervene in protests or unrest in Democratic-led cities "under no circumstances," unless assistance was formally requested.

Trump emphasised that federal agencies would not proactively intervene, they would continue to protect federal buildings and property.

Trump has also warned that he could invoke the Insurrection Act, a law that grants the president sweeping authority to deploy the military to quell domestic unrest. —*ANI*

New Mexico puts Meta on trial over child safety

SANTE FE, 1 FEB

Meta is accused of not prioritising children's safety—*META*

Jury selection will begin on Monday in New Mexico for the first State trial targeting Meta Platforms, marking a test case for how States pursue social media companies over alleged harms to children.

The lawsuit, filed in 2023 by Attorney General Raúl Torrez, is built on an undercover investigation using decoy social media accounts posing as children aged under 14. Prosecutors say the operation documented sexual solicitations and inadequate responses from Meta.

Torrez accuses Meta of creating a "breeding ground" for predators, prioritising profits over child safety, and failing to disclose known risks to minors. Meta denies the civil charges, calling the case "sensationalist", and says regulators are oversimplifying complex issues around online harm.

Opening statements are scheduled for 9 February, with the trial expected to last two months. Prosecutors argue they are challenging Meta's algorithmic practices rather than user content, a strategy that could sidestep protections under Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act. Legal experts say a verdict against Meta could have implications for cases nationwide. —*PTI*

UNION BUDGET 2026

BUSINESS

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU
SALAR | MONDAY | 2 FEBRUARY 2026

To address practical issues of small taxpayers like students, young professionals, tech employees, relocated NRIs, and others, the Budget aims to introduce a one-time 6-month foreign asset disclosure scheme for these taxpayers to disclose income or assets below a certain size.

Net market borrowing
₹11.7 lakh crore

Gross market borrowing
₹17.2 lakh crore

Net tax receipts estimated:
₹28.7 lakh crore
in FY27

HIGHLIGHTS

All IT services will be clubbed under a single category with a common safe harbour margin of 15.5%.

Threshold for availing safe harbour for IT services to be enhanced to ₹2,000 crore from ₹300 crore.

Complete removal of the current value cap of ₹10 lakh per consignment on courier exports-supports aspirations of India's small businesses, artisans and start-ups to access global markets.

Fastracking unilateral APA process for IT services with an aim to conclude it within a period of two years. Can be extended by a further period of six months on the taxpayer's request.

New I-T law to be effective from 1 April

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday said the Income Tax Act, 2025 will be implemented from 1 April and rules and tax returns forms will be notified shortly.

The Income Tax Act, 2025, will come into force replacing the six-decade-old tax law and the changes made in tax laws in 2026-27 Budget will be incorporated in the new legislation.

In her Budget speech in the Lok Sabha, she said, "This (direct tax code) was completed in record time and the Income Tax Act 2025 will come into effect from 1 April. Adequate time will be given to taxpayers to acquaint themselves with its requirements."

The forms have been redesigned, such that ordinary citizens can comply without difficulty, she added.

The 2025 I-T law is revenue neutral with no change in tax rates. It has only made direct tax laws simple to understand, removed ambiguities, thereby reducing scope for litigations. It reduces text volume and sections by about 50 per cent vis-a-vis the 1961 Income Tax Act.

The new law simplifies the tax timeline by doing away with the distinction between the assessment year and the previous year, replacing it with a single "tax year" framework. It also allows taxpayers to claim TDS refund even when ITRs are filed after deadlines, without any penal charges. *—PTI*

NRIs will now be able to invest in Indian stocks

The scheme lets overseas individuals buy stocks via spl bank acc

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday said individual persons residing outside India (PROI) will be permitted equity investments in listed Indian companies through a Portfolio Investment Scheme.

She also proposed raising the investment limit for PROIs to 10 per cent from 5 per cent.

She also proposed making a framework with suitable access to funds and derivatives on corporate bond indices.

Additionally, Sitharaman proposed a six-month foreign asset disclosure scheme for small taxpayers like students, tech professionals and relocated NRIs as she presented the Union Budget 2026-27.

She said there will be no interest liability on taxpayers on the penalty amount for the period of appeal before the first appellate authority, irrespective of the outcome.

She also proposed exemptions of three years for dividend income received by notified cooperatives on investments made up to 31 January.

Meanwhile, to ease the compliance burden, the government proposed that an individual purchasing immovable properties from non-residents will not be required to furnish TAN details for tax deduction. Under the new framework proposed in the Union Budget 2026-27, resident individuals or Hindu Undivided family (HUF) can report the Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) by quoting PAN numbers, as it is done when the transactions are between two residents. Tax Deduction and Collection Account Num ber (TAN) are issued to corporate entities, while Permanent Account Number (PAN) are for individuals. She said, "TDS on the sale of immovable property by a non-resident is proposed to be deducted and deposited through the resident buyer's PAN-based challan instead of requiring TAN". The revised norm will be effective from 1 October. *—Agencies*

To encourage non-resident workers, **Minimum Alternate Tax will be exempted for 5 years**

Silver tumbles to hit lower circuit at Rs 2.65 lakh/kg

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Falling for the second consecutive day, silver slumped by Rs 26,273 per kg or 9 per cent to Rs 2.65 lakh per kg in futures trade on Sunday, while gold fell 3 per cent to Rs 1.47 lakh per 10g as investors keep booking profits at elevated levels.On the MCX, silver for March delivery tanked Rs 26,273, or 9 per cent, to close at its lower circuit limit of Rs 2,65,652 per kg. Gold futures also witnessed high volatility on Sunday, with April contract plunging by 9 per cent to Rs 1,38,634 per 10g in early trade, hitting the lower circuit level on the MCX. Later, it recovered some of its losses to close at Rs 1,48,104 per 10g, down by 3 per cent or Rs 4,241. *–PTI*

—FREEPIK

Duty on seafood, leather export inputs likely to rise

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The government on Sunday proposed an increase in the duty-free import limit for specified inputs used in the export of processed seafood products and leather or synthetic footwear. For the processing seafood products segment, the limit will be increased from the current 1 per cent to 3 per cent of the free on board value of last year's turnover. These announcements are important as these labour-intensive sectors are facing huge challenges in US, which is a major export destination. The Trump administration has imposed a steep 50 per cent import duty on Indian goods entering US. The country's leather and leather products shipments dipped marginally 0.23 per cent to $3.3 billion during April-December 2025-26. *–PTI*

Tax holiday for global cloud services using India data centres

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The Union Budget on Sunday proposed a tax holiday till 2047 for foreign companies that provide cloud services to customers globally using data centres located in India.

By linking tax benefits to serving global customers from India, the policy seeks to turn the country into an export hub for cloud computing.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed to provide a safe harbour of 15 per cent on cost in case the company providing data centre services from India is a related entity.

To avail the tax holiday, such companies need to provide services to Indian customers through an Indian reseller entity.

Data centres are secure facilities filled with powerful computers and servers that store, process and transmit digital data behind services ranging from emails and banking all the way to streaming and cloud platforms.

To harness the efficiency of just-in-time logistics for electronic manufacturing, she proposed to provide safe harbour to non-residents for component warehousing in a bonded warehouse at a profit margin of 2 per cent of the invoice value. *—PTI*

FM announces Rs 10,000 cr fund for MSMEs

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday announced a three-pronged strategy, including a dedicated Rs 10,000 crore fund, to help micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) grow as 'Champions'.

Outlining measures under the government's growth agenda, Sitharaman said MSMEs remain a vital engine of employment and productivity. She proposed Equity Support, Liquidity Support and Professional Support to scale up competitive enterprises.

"I propose to introduce a dedicated Rs 10,000 crore SME Growth Fund to create future Champions," she said. She announced a Rs 2,000 crore top-up to the Self-Reliant India Fund to support micro enterprises and sustain access to risk capital. To further strengthen liquidity access for textile MSMEs, the Government has announced key measures to enhance the effectiveness of the Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS), under which over Rs 7 lakh crore has already been facilitated. *—PTI*

₹10,000 crore to boost container manufacturing

- Govt to facilitate professional institutions to develop 'Corporate Mitras' especially in Tier-II and Tier-III towns.
- Three dedicated chemical parks will also be set up.
- No customs on the import of sodium antimonate used in glass.

High-level panel set up to review banking

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday announced setting up a 'High Level Committee on Banking for Viksit Bharat', to comprehensively review the sector and align it with India's next phase of growth.

Observing that the banking sector today is characterised by strong balance sheets, historic highs in profitability, improved asset quality and coverage exceeding 98 per cent of villages in the country, she said, we are well placed to futuristically evaluate the measures needed to continue on the path of reform-led growth of this sector at this juncture.

The vision for NBFCs for Viksit Bharat has been outlined with clear targets for credit disbursement and technology adoption, she said.

In order to achieve scale and improve efficiency in the Public Sector NBFCs, she said, as a first step, it is proposed to restructure the Power Finance Corporation and Rural Electrification Corporation. *—PTI*

Taxes to yield 64P of every rupee in govt coffers: Budget docu

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

For every rupee in the government's coffers, the largest slice of 64 paise will come from direct and indirect taxes, according to the Union Budget 2026-27 documents.

Around 24 paise will come from borrowings and other liabilities, 10 paise from non-tax revenue like disinvestment, and 2 paise from non-debt capital receipts, the Budget documents showed.

Income tax will yield 21 paise, corporation tax 18 paise, and goods and services tax (GST) 15 paise per rupee of revenue.

The government will earn 6 paise from excise duty and 4 paise from customs levy in every rupee of revenue.

The Budget documents provide a fractional break-up for Rs 1 that comes in and gets spent.

The outlay for interest payments and states' share of taxes and duties, respectively, stood at 20 paise and 22 paise for every rupee. *—PTI*

2,375 STOCKS DECLINE ON BSE; PHARMA STOCKS RISE

MUMBAI, 1 FEB

Over 2,375 stocks declined on the BSE, 1,759 advanced, and 175 remained unchanged, as a hike in STT on futures dampened market sentiment.

State Bank of India fell 5.61 per cent and Adani Ports dropped 5.53 per cent, while other laggards included Bharat Electronics, ITC, Tata Steel, UltraTech Cement and Reliance Industries. In contrast, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys and Titan ended higher. Among sectoral indices, BSE PSU Bank fell the most at 5.60 per cent, followed by metals (-3.85 per cent), commodities (-3.35 per cent), energy (-3.14 per cent), capital goods (-3.02 per cent), utilities (-2.98 per cent), industrials (-2.66 per cent) and power (-2.52 per cent). IT and BSE Focused IT indices were the only gainers. The 30-share BSE Sensex traded 281.75 points higher at 82,532.68, while NSE Nifty rose 61.10 points to 25,376.05.

Pharmaceutical stocks surged following the announcement of a Rs 10,000 crore investment in the bio-pharma sector over five years. Biocon gained 0.48 per cent, Panacea Biotec 0.86 per cent, Natco Pharma 0.71 per cent, and Gland Pharma 1.22 per cent. Meanwhile, Anthem Biosciences fell 0.99 per cent, Syngene International 1.17 per cent, Concord Biotech 4.75 per cent, and Dr Reddys Lab 1.41 per cent

Electronics manufacturing stocks also rallied after a Rs 40,000 crore outlay. Syrma SGS Technology jumped 5.95 per cent, Dixon Technologies 4.21 per cent, Kaynes Technology 3.82 per cent, PG Electroplast 2.59 per cent, DCX Systems 2.06 per cent and Cyient DLM 1.04 per cent. *—PTI*

Deadline for revised I-T return extended to 31 March

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday proposed extending the time limit for filing revised income tax returns from 31 December to 31 March, on payment of a nominal fee.

She announced that small businesses and professionals whose accounts are not subject to audit will be allowed to file income tax returns until 31 August instead of 31 July. Salaried taxpayers will continue to follow the 31 July deadline.

The revision window will be expanded from nine months to 12 months from the end of the tax year, enabling taxpayers who file belated returns to correct errors. A rule-based automated scheme has also been proposed for small taxpayers to simplify procedures.

Sitharaman also proposed exempting awards granted by Motor Accident Claims Tribunals from income tax. *—Agencies*

TO DISCOURAGE TAX MISUSE

Share buybacks to be taxed as capital gains

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday proposed a major overhaul of the taxation framework governing share buybacks to protect minority shareholders and curb tax arbitrage by promoters.

Sitharaman said that buybacks will be taxed as capital gains for all categories of shareholders.

To discourage misuse of tax arbitrage, promoters will be subject to an additional buyback tax, raising the effective tax rate to 22 per cent for corporate promoters and 30 per cent for non-corporate promoters.

Market experts believe that the higher tax burden on promoters may lead companies to reassess their capital allocation strategies between dividends and buybacks.

Roop Bhootra, whole-time director, Anand Rathi Share and Stock Brokers, said the move will benefit individual shareholders as tax liability reduces from 30 per cent to capital gains rates (short term 20 per cent and long-term 12.5 per cent) and negative for corporates and discourages buyback and pushes corporates to use reserves for capital expenditure and/or R&D.

Buyback tax is levied on companies that buyback their own shares from shareholders. Governments impose this tax to restrain firms from distributing profits to shareholders through share buybacks. *—PTI*

'OWNING THE TECH STACK'

India Inc hails Budget 2026 for bold bets

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

India Inc on Sunday hailed the Union Budget 2026-27 as a "structural shift" in the country's technology landscape, noting that the government is moving beyond fragmented pilots to build foundational layers where AI serves as a "horizontal enabler" for the entire economy.

Industry experts observed that the announcement of a tax holiday for data centres until 2047 and the expansion of the semiconductor mission will reduce investment uncertainty and improve capital confidence.

This, they stated, signals a clear intent to transform India into a "producer of digital value" focused on deep-tech R&D and indigenous IP creation, rather than just assembly or service delivery.

Mahesh Makhija, Leader and Partner, Technology Consulting, EY India, termed the emphasis on large-scale capacity-building AI missions as a "structural shift" in how India is preparing for an AI-driven economy.

Echoing this sentiment, S Anjani Kumar, Partner at Deloitte India, noted that the Budget treats AI as a "horizontal enabler" for the entire economy.

Manpreet Singh Ahuja, Chief Clients Officer and TMT Leader, PwC India, said the Budget is a clear signal that India wants to be a "producer of digital value." *—PTI*

16th Fin Comm suggests states' share in central taxes remain 41% for 5 years

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The 16th Finance Commission, chaired by former Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman Arvind Panagariya, has recommended that states' share in Central taxes remains at 41 per cent for five years starting 1 April, 2026. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, "The government has accepted the recommendation of the Commission to retain the vertical share of devolution at 41 per cent."

The Centre will provide Rs 1.4 lakh crore to states for FY 2026-27 as Finance Commission Grants, including Rural and Urban Local Body and Disaster Management Grants. The report was tabled in Parliament by Sitharaman on Sunday. The Commission, established under the Constitution, determines the formula for tax devolution between the Centre and states. Cesses and surcharges levied by Centre are excluded from the divisible pool.

The Commission was set up on 31 December, 2023, with members including Annie George Mathew, Manoj Panda, Soumya Ghosh, and T Rabi Sankar, who submitted the report to President Droupadi Murmu on 17 November, 2025. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Anahat Singh enters final of Squash on Fire

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Indian teenage star Anahat Singh reached her maiden PSA bronze-level final at the Squash on Fire Open in Washington with a 3-1 victory over Sabrina Sobhy of the USA. The Indian world No. 31 and seventh seed defeated the American 11-9, 11-3, 9-11, 11-5 in the semifinals. Sabrina is ranked world No. 23. Anahat will meet top seed and world No. 10 Georgina Kennedy of England in the title clash. Anahat had defeated second seed Sana Ibrahim of Egypt in the quarterfinals.—*PTI*

PCB

Pakistan whitewash Australia with 111-run win

LAHORE, 1 FEB

Pakistan defeated Australia by 111 runs to complete a series whitewash in the third T20 match. In the third and final T20 of the series at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore, Pakistan won the toss and chose to bat first against Australia. Batting first against Australia, Pakistan scored 207 runs for the loss of 6 wickets in the allotted 20 overs after winning the toss. In the early overs, Fakhar Zaman was dismissed for 10 runs off 7 balls. Salman Agha managed 5 runs off just 3 deliveries. However, Saim Ayub played an impressive aggressive knock, scoring 56 runs off 37 balls, including 6 fours and 2 sixes. Babar Azam played a responsible innings, remaining unbeaten on 50 runs off 36 balls. Khawaja Nafi contributed 21 runs off 12 balls. Shadab Khan played a blistering knock of 46 runs off 19 balls, taking Pakistan close to the 200-run mark. Faheem Ashraf finished the innings with 10 runs off 4 balls. Pakistan's overall run rate was 10.35, with 4 extra runs added in the final overs.—*PTI*

Plipuech knocks out Ankita from Mumbai Open Qualifiers

MUMBAI, 1 FEB

Veteran Indian tennis player Ankita Raina crashed out of the Qualifiers of the Mumbai Open WTA 125K Series event even as four others made it to the main draw here Sunday. Ankita stumbled against Thailand's Peangtarn Plipuech, who got over the line 6-2, 1-6, 6-4 in a match that lasted two hours and 39 minutes. Japan's Matsuda Misaki, Zuzzana Pawlikowska, and Kristiana Sidorova were the other players who booked their place in the main draw. Misaki pulled off a sensational result to defeat top-seeded Argentine Nicole Fossa Huergo.—*PTI*

Miami beats Atletico Nacional 2-1 in pre-season friendly

COLOMBIA, 1 FEB

Inter Miami found its first win of 2026, beating Atlético Nacional 2-1 in a pre-season friendly in front of a packed Estadio Atanasio Girardot in Medellin, Colombia, on Saturday night. Miami, led by Messi, had started its pre-season campaign with a 0-3 loss to Alianza Lima last week, and went behind in its second game too, with Juan Rengifo's curling shot kissing the net in the 26th minute. Miami's reply almost came 10 minutes later when Messi took a shot on target. But former Arsenal and Napoli goalkeeper David Ospina met it with equal quality to ensure Atlético Nacional remained in front.—*PTI*

Alcaraz beats Djokovic

ALCARAZ CALLS DJOKOVIC 'INSPIRING'

MELBOURNE, 1 FEB

Carlos Alcaraz is the youngest man ever to complete a career Grand Slam after securing the Australian Open title against Novak Djokovic, who had never lost in his 10 previous finals at Melbourne Park.

The top-ranked Alcaraz dropped the first set Sunday as Djokovic went out hard in pursuit of a record 25th major title, but he dug deep to win 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5.

As he was leaving the court, he signed the lens of the TV camera with a note of recognition: "Job finished. 4/4 Complete." Once he secured victory, Alcaraz let his racket slip out of his hand and fell to the ground on his back, putting his hands to his head.

"First, I just want to talk about Novak. I think he deserves some ovation for sure. You are talking about how I'm doing things, but what you're doing, Novak, is really inspiring," Alcaraz said. "For me, it has been an honour sharing the locker room and the court with you." —*PTI*

Carlos Alcaraz poses with the Australian Open 2026 trophy along with Novak Djokovic in the final -AO

DJOKOVIC'S RESULTS IN GRAND SLAMS SINCE WINNING HIS 24TH TITLE IN 2024

- Australian Open: Semifinals (lost to Jannik Sinner)
- French Open: Quarterfinals (walkover/injured when due to face Casper Ruud)
- Wimbledon: Final (lost to Carlos Alcaraz)
- US Open: Third round (lost to Alexei Popyrin)
- **2025** Australian Open: Semifinals (retired against Alexander Zverev)
- French Open: Semifinals (lost to Jannik Sinner)
- Wimbledon: Semifinals (lost to Jannik Sinner
- US Open: Semifinals (lost to Carlos Alcaraz)
- **2026**Australian Open: Final (lost to Carlos Alcaraz)

RANJI TROPHY

Devdutt Padikkal -PTI

Karnataka qualifies for quarterfinals

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

Karnataka pulled off one of the most stunning wins in the ongoing season of the Ranji Trophy against Punjab at the IS Bindra Cricket Stadium in Mohali on Sunday.With 250 runs to chase on the final day, the odds were stacked against the visiting side.

But skipper Devdutt Padikkal became the knight in shining armour for Karnataka as he smashed a swashbuckling 85-ball 120 to help his side cross the finish line and qualify for the knockouts in a dramatic fashion.

His innings saw him smash five sixes and six fours. Karnataka, with the five-wicket win, finished second in Group B with 27 points, behind leader Madhya Pradesh.

The quarterfinal will see Padikkal's side lock horns against an unbeaten Mumbai.

Karnataka chased down a 250-run target in just 28 overs to join Madhya Pradesh from Group B in the top eight teams this season.

Apart from Karnataka, Bengal, and Uttarakhand from Group C, Jharkhand and Andhra from Group A, and Mumbai and Jammu & Kashmir from Group D have qualified for the knockouts.

KL Rahul was dismissed cheaply on Day 4, but Padikkal forged an exhilarating 113-run partnership off 72 balls to give Karnataka hopes of a memorable win. After Agarwal was dismissed for a 36-ball 53 by Emanjot Singh Chahal, Aneesh KV and Smaran Ravichandran fell in quick succession.

From 130/1, Karnataka slumped to 134/4 in no time. Padikkal needed support, and he got it from Shreyas Gopal, who made 33 off 22 balls. Their fifth-wicket partnership yielded 67 runs off just 42 balls. After Gopal departed, Vidhyadhar Patel walked out to the crease.

Ranji Trophy 2025-26 quarterfinals fixtures

Jharkhand vs Uttarakhand in Ranchi
Madhya Pradesh vs Jammu & Kashmir in Indore
Bengal vs Andhra in Kalyani, Kolkata
Mumbai vs Karnataka in Mumbai. —*PTI*

India U-17 girls gear up for a stringent Bangladesh test

POKHARA, 1 FEB

India will look to book their place in the final with a game to spare when Pamela Conti's Under-17 side takes on a strong Bangladesh side in their second match of the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship at the Pokhara Rangasala Stadium here on Monday.

Fielding their U-17 team as part of preparations for the AFC U-17 Women's Asian Cup in China later this year, India began their campaign with a hard-fought 1-0 win over hosts Nepal.

Another victory against Bangladesh, coupled with Bhutan failing to beat Nepal in the later kick-off, will confirm India's spot in the title clash.

The Young Tigresses were pushed hard by Nepal, with the decisive goal coming in the 49th minute through Pearl Fernandes, the 16-year-old striker's 10th goal for the U-17 national side. Reflecting on her first match in charge, head coach Conti felt her players were eager but still adapting to her system. "In my humble opinion, with me being a new coach, the players had a strong desire to do more and to prove themselves. They are still not fully secure in their place in the team, and they want to show more, which led us to make more mistakes than usual. —*PTI*

KHELO INDIA MISSION

Govt proposes to transform sports sector over next decade

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The government's flagship Khelo India programme to scout grassroots-level sporting talent is set to get a boost with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday proposing the launch of a Khelo India mission to also focus on systemic development of training centres and coaches over the next decade.

Presenting the Union Budget for the year 2026-27, the minister said the mission will facilitate an integrated talent development programme through interlinking pathways.

The Khelo India programme was launched in 2017, and its primary objective was to hold national-level competitions across age groups for talent identification.

The sports goods manufacturing sector emerged as a major beneficiary with a first-time allocation of ₹ **500 crore** as the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports' allocation was hiked by over Rs 1000 crore in the Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman here on Sunday. —*PTI*

Ireland qualifies for Women's T20 WC 2026

KIRTIPUR, 1 FEB

Ireland became the third team to qualify for the upcoming Women's T20 World Cup 2026, which will take place in England and Wales, after beating Thailand by 62 runs in the Global Qualifiers in Kirtipur, Nepal, on Sunday.

The Irish women, who last played in the 2023 edition, notched up three wins from five games in the Super Six stage to join the Netherlands and Bangladesh in the ICC showpiece later this year.

Ireland set a 122-run target for Thailand, which was bundled out for only 59. Arlene Kelly picked up a four-wicket haul, while Lara McBride took three scalps to help their side seal a comfortable victory.

Ireland, placed in Group A in the league stage, secured three wins from four games, beating Papua New Guinea, the USA, and Namibia, while losing only to table-topper Bangladesh. It lost to Scotland and Bangladesh in the Super Six stage but defeated the USA, Netherlands, and Thailand to secure its spot.

With the Netherlands, Bangladesh, and Ireland's results, 11 teams have secured their spots. England, Australia, India, New Zealand, South Africa, West Indies, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka had qualified automatically for the global event.

The winner of the USA vs Scotland ongoing match will secure the fourth and final berth.

The ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 begins on June 12 in England and Wales. —*PTI*

Pak to boycott T20WC game against India but compete in tournament

LAHORE, 1 FEB

Pakistan on Sunday formally announced its decision to boycott its marquee ICC T20 World Cup group league match against India, even as the government cleared the national team's participation for the rest of the tournament, starting February 7. The Pakistan government's decision is being perceived as a mark of protest after the ICC replaced Bangladesh with Scotland, not accepting the latter's demand to shift its matches from India to Sri Lanka due to security reasons.

In a statement posted on its verified social media handle, the government of Pakistan said it has granted approval to the Pakistan cricket team to take part in the tournament but said the team "shall not take the field" for the February 15 fixture against India in Colombo. The decision brings an end to days of speculation over Pakistan's participation in the tournament, which is being co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka, and comes amid heightened political tensions in the region. "The Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan grants approval to the Pakistan Cricket Team to participate in the ICC World T20 2026; however, the Pakistan Cricket Team shall not take the field in the match scheduled on 15th February 2026 against India," the government posted on social media. PCB had said that the government would decide on the team's participation in the tournament in the wake of Bangladesh's ouster from the tournament. —*PTI*

ICC U-19 WC 2026: India beat Pakistan

India U-19 defeated Pakistan U-19 by 58 runs to set up a semi-final clash with Afghanistan U-19 in the U19 World Cup 2026 on Sunday. Midway through the game, the Ayush Mhatre-led side eliminated Pakistan U-19, making it to the final four of the event. To secure a place in the semi-finals and knock Pakistan out of contention, India U-19 needed to stop Pakistan U-19 from completing the chase of 253 in 33.3 overs or less, and the Ayush Mhatre-led side successfully managed to do so at Queens Sports Club, Bulawayo.

D Gukesh suffers defeat as Abdusattorov leads

WIJK AAN ZEE, 1 FEB

World Champion D Gukesh played out a draw with Hans Moke Niemann in the 12th and penultimate round while Nodirbek Abdusattorov regained sole lead with a crushing victory over Matthias Bluebaum to inch closer to the title, here Sunday.

Javokhir Sindarov did not risk anything against R Praggnanandhaa and settled for a draw to slip to second spot on 7.5 points, a half point behind compatriot Abdu sattorov, and it could well be an Uzbek domination in the first super-tournament of the year. Niemann, Jorden van Foreest of Holland, and Vincent Keymer of Germany share the third spot on 7 points apiece ahead of wonder-boy Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus of Turkey and Bluebaum.—*PTI*

THAILAND MASTERS

Devika Sihag secures maiden Super 300 title

BANGKOK, 1 FEB

The 20-year-old from Haryana, Devika Sihag, clinched her maiden title -PTI

Young Indian shuttler Devika Sihag clinched her maiden BWF Super 300 crown after Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei retired midway through the women's singles final of the Thailand Masters, a USD 250,000 event, here on Sunday.

The 20-year-old from Haryana was leading 21-8, 6-3 when world No. 68 Goh, a two-time world junior champion, pulled out due to a hamstring injury, handing the Indian the biggest title of her career.

Ranked world No. 63, Devika trains under coach Umendra Rana at the Padukone-Dravid Centre for Sports Excellence in Bengaluru and has also been sharpening her game alongside two-time Olympic medallist P. V. Sindhu under Indonesian coach Irwansyah Adi Pratama.

Devika's rise on the circuit has been steady. She claimed her maiden international title at the Malaysia International in August 2025 and later contributed to India's mixed team bronze at the 2025 World University Games.

Last season, she finished runner-up at the Indonesia Masters Super 100 and reached four finals in 2024, winning the Swedish Open and Portugal International, while becoming second at the Estonian International and Dutch International. —*PTI*

NATIONAL ROWING C'SHIP: SSCB, ARMY SPORTS CONTROL BOARD TAKE TOP SPOTS

PUNE, 1 FEB

The Services Sports Control Board (SSCB) and the Army Sports Control Board have secured the first and second positions, respectively, in the overall standings at the 43rd Senior National Rowing Championship held at the Army Rowing Node (ARN) in Pune, officials said on Sunday.

The championship, held from 27 to 31 January at the ARN under the Mission Olympics Wing of the College of Military Engineering (CME), witnessed high-intensity contests, strong performances by elite rowers and smooth organisational conduct, marking another key moment for competitive rowing in the country, a release said.

Teams from various states and services participated in the championship.

One of the major highlights was the Para Single Scull event, which organisers said reflected the values of resilience and inclusivity in sport.

Medal-winning crews from both SSCB and ASCB included rowers trained at the Army Rowing Node, underlining its role in developing elite talent under the Mission Olympics programme, the officials noted. —*PTI*